

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF CLEOPATRA

BY
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TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH
BY
HERBERT WILSON

With Frontispiece and 12 other Illustrations

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

THE author of the following pages, instinct with the emotion and picturesqueness which are a part of the French nation, is herself a writer of some distinction whose work, *L'Autre Amour*, received the honour of being crowned by the French Academy. Among her other works may be mentioned *Le Plus Fort*, *Vie de Château*, *Ciel Rouge*, *Ma Figure*, and *Un Double Amour*. *La Vie et la Mort de Cléopâtre* is of another genre in which she has given rein to her imagination in producing an historic romance out of one of the most famous episodes of the kind known to humanity, with a power of vivid presentment and picturesque local detail which make the scenes live again before our eyes. In doing this she has by no means sacrificed historic accuracy in so far as this is obtainable amid the many divergent accounts which have come down to us; and in her treatment of the actions and motives swaying the mind of Cleopatra much still remains, and doubtless always will remain, matter for conjecture. Students of Shakespeare will notice some difference in the arrangement of events, places, and the principal personages to that adopted by him in his "Antony and Cleopatra," but I think it will be agreed that her presentment of Cleopatra, though offering certain interpretations in a fresh and original manner, is a real contribution to our knowledge of that mysterious and compelling personality whose fatal attractions drew the most powerful to their ruin, and whose passions altered the destinies of the world.

H. W.

Neuilly, 1924.

The Life and Death of Cleopatra

CHAPTER I

JULIUS CÆSAR

It was about seven o'clock in the evening. Sailors were finishing unloading their merchandise on the littered quays of Alexandria. Swiftly, like belated birds, fishing-boats were regaining the old docks of the port of Eunoste. Night had nearly fallen when one last little boat glided furtively in. A man of broad shoulders, enveloped in a dark cloak with the head-dress worn by travellers crushed down over his ears, got out. With infinite care he assisted the landing of a woman so young and so agile that she might have been taken for a child.

Although she was hardly yet seventeen, could it be said, however, that Cleopatra was a child? Already married two years to the brother whom dynastic law had imposed upon her on the death of their father, cast aside by this disloyal associate, and sent into banishment from which she had returned under the protection of Apollodorus this very evening, in any case she had had a variety of experiences not usual at such an age. We may ask ourselves what impressions customary to a child could the daughter of Ptolemy Auletes have gathered in the midst of the depraved and unblushing court of that amazing dilettante king who only thought of opposing to the disorders of revolution and foreign invasion the strains of his flute? However this may be, this young girl sprung from a race that had been cultivated to

excess, brought up entirely on art and literature, and profoundly versed in deep studies, was certainly entering upon life with unusual ^{pre-eminence} precocity. At an age when others just released from the *gynæceum* still love virtue, or dream of frivolous pleasures, she had already acquired the desire to captivate and to rule. Free from all prejudice, her mind dared to look things in the face; she was not ignorant of the value of men, and to make use of them or to please them she brought an intelligent, keen, and well-informed mind.

When in the depths of the Thebaid (whither the king had banished her by the counsels of the agitator Photinus) she learned that Julius Cæsar had entered Alexandria, she understood by one of those intuitions which sometimes are felt by ultra-sensitive people, that an unlooked-for piece of good fortune had come. But how was she to reach the great man? By what means obtain from his all-embracing power that aid which from a captive could make her a queen? The learned Greek Apollodorus, who had been her professor of rhetoric and had remained faithfully attached to her, entered into negotiations. As Cæsar, at the very first approaches, had shown himself favourable to the young persecuted woman rather than to Ptolemy and his crafty minister, she did not hesitate. Strictly watched over as she was and infested as were the roads at that time by bands of robbers and murderers, she made her escape accompanied only by two slaves, and went up the Nile as far as Canopus where Apollodorus was awaiting her. With the support of his solid devotion she felt certain of being able to attain her end. The journey, however, had not been without risks. The crazy little fishing-boat which had purposely been selected from among the most poor-looking craft so as not to attract attention, had barely missed drowning them. How her spirits bounded with joy as under her little trembling feet the young daughter of the Lagides felt the soil of her capital, her dear Alexandria, which by right of birth she considered as her own domain!

The question now was how to reach the palace, and that was not very easy. Notwithstanding the Roman occupation, the soldiers and agents of the Egyptian king had their eye everywhere. If recognised, Cleopatra would fall again into the power of her brother.

Apollodorus, happily, was not wanting either in astuteness or strength. With all the care that so precious an object demanded, he rolled up the fugitive, making her shape disappear under the form of a bundle of coverlets which he hoisted on his shoulders just like a mere bale. Seeing this dock labourer finding his way along the quays laden to all appearances like so many others, who would have suspected the mystery of his load? At Bruchium he was recognised. On declaring that in obedience to Cæsar's desire he was coming to bring some carpets to show him, the guards allowed him to enter.

Julius Cæsar at that time was no longer a young man. All the glory, authority and pleasure that life could give he had already obtained, and his nervous organisation seemed for the time being to be exhausted. His prematurely aged brow and the furrowed lines of his face pointed to this weariness; but on the slightest emotion his lightning glance was prompt to give it the lie. No one could approach the divine Julius without forthwith falling under his ascendancy, without experiencing something at once august and fascinating which people, by way of explanation, traced back to his ancestry through Æneas to Venus. When he spoke his affable demeanour and the harmonious accents of his voice drew to him as much admiration as what he said. When he remained silent his silence was eloquent, for people remembered the speeches and memorable words which had burst from his mobile lips and had been echoed by the entire world. Wherever he went the *prestige* of his exploits surrounded him. Not only did people picture him at the head of his legions leading them from one extremity of Gaul to the other which his

victories had made his own ; not only did they see him descending again on Italy through the gorges of the Alps and, with a bound that was decisive, leap across the narrow Rubicon and fall upon Rome in revolt, who, on the appearance of this conqueror, at once lay submissive at his feet ; but legend had laid hold of his name. The Germans he had conquered were represented as giants whose glance was fatal ; people related that Britain, whither he had been the first who had dared to adventure, was in the darkness of night for three months on end and was inhabited by phantoms ; and all these vain tales, added to his real victories, made him appear still more marvellous.

In applying to a man like this, and in coming to him to beg for his aid and assistance, Cleopatra doubtless relied on her own lawful rights, but she was not so simple as to believe that the best chance a woman has of obtaining justice is always to have right on her side. No sooner had she been let out from the sack in which for the last hour her charms had been imprisoned, than she danced about like some young animal who has recovered its liberty, and then with a haste altogether feminine she seized the little mirror of burnished silver which hung by a little chain to her girdle. What disarray it showed ! Her fine linen tunic was completely rumpled ; her hair had become undone and rolled over her neck in brown waves ; of the antimony round her eyes and the paint on her mouth and cheeks, not an atom remained. But just as she was, adorned only by her youth, was she any the less captivating, less expressive, less disconcerting—this delicious suppliant who the next moment was to find herself in front of her judge ? She was, nevertheless, ill at ease, and asked herself how this man, accustomed to the artifices of Roman woman, this potentate whom all—the most virtuous as well as the most corrupt—did their utmost to please, would receive her ? For the reputation of Cæsar had passed beyond the seas. It was known that just as he was a great



The Reception by Julius Cæsar of Cleopatra.
(From the painting by Gérôme.)

captain, writer, jurist and orator, he was also a libertine. Over and above the excesses common to all young people in which he had largely indulged in the realm of gallantry, it was known that his follies had brought trouble into numerous households, not excepting those of his best friends, and people had not taken in good part the epithet *omnium mulierum vir* which attached to his name.

Cleopatra, however, had no reason to be alarmed. What could be more likely to make a deep impression on a mind eager for anything new, original, and out of the common, or on nerves become *blasé* like those of the Emperor, than the spectacle of her royal youth? From the first moment that he gazed on the rhythmic and musical grace of her form—her little forehead joining the base of her nose in almost a straight line, the pupils of her eyes swimming as with a glint of gold in them, her nostrils delicate as wings, her half-opened, full, sensual lips, and above all, her skin, her gleaming skin of the colour of amber which made the beholder think of some beautiful sun-warmed fruit—an indescribable shiver passed through him. Never had the West, even Rome with its passionate virgins, its tempting and experienced matrons, offered anything so delectable to his desire. And ready to agree to everything in order to obtain all, he questioned her.

"What wilt thou? What request is it in my power to satisfy?"

✓ In charming compliment to him the young woman replied in Latin, which she spoke with as much facility as Greek, Egyptian, Syriac and several other languages. She laid bare the abuse of power of which she had been the victim, the iniquity which had made her a poor little wandering princess and, with an air of confiding herself to him which rendered her irresistible, she confessed that she was counting on the all-embracing power of Cæsar to restore her crown.

Her voice was soft and insinuating; what she said,

and her claims against her usurping brother, became unanswerable truths the moment she had given expression to them. How, to say the least, would they not have appeared so to her gallant judge upon whom, like radiant stars, she directed her wonderful black eyes?

He at once conceived a tender desire to grant her request. But there were difficulties which presented themselves. Having entered Egypt in the guise of a friend he only had at his disposal a few troops. Those of Ptolemy, on the contrary, were numerous, and resolute in the defence of their king. Wisdom dictated no sudden measures. This was not at all her view, for her eagerness to obtain power had the impetuosity of a flood in spring. With a display of eagerness and warlike spirit unlooked for in one so young, Cleopatra set herself to impart her ardour to Cæsar. If he could not at once enter the field on her behalf, could he not summon his legions with the utmost despatch and while awaiting their arrival proclaim her as sole sovereign?

While she spoke the Emperor never took his eyes off her. He followed her every undulating movement and the exquisite curve of her lips. "What an adorable mistress she would make!" he said to himself while drinking in the perfume of her hair.

And divining her conquest and ready to acquiesce in everything, Cleopatra felt herself thrilled with this delicious certainty, "In a little while I shall be queen!"

On learning that the sister whom he thought he had got rid of had come back to Alexandria and that Cæsar had sworn to re-establish her on the throne, Ptolemy XIV had one of those mad fits of rage to which this scion of a degenerate race was subject. "The traitress!" he cried, stamping underfoot a murrhine vase of wondrous beauty, "she hath made mock of me! The arbitration which she hath had the impudence to invoke is nothing but a heinous felony!" And placing Achilles at the head of his troops, he had the Roman guard massacred.

This was the beginning of a war which was to last two years. Having behind him the whole force of the Republic, it was clear that Cæsar must win; but the beginning, taking the form of brawls and outbreaks to which his soldiers were not accustomed, was difficult. Rather than expose himself any longer to street fights in which he had not always the advantage, Cleopatra's defender judged it prudent to shut himself up with his garrison within the walls of Bruchium which at a pinch might serve as a fortress and stand a siege while he was waiting for the promised legions.

What more favourable conditions could the young woman have dreamed of than to be shut up with the man she had vowed to bewitch until he should have no other interests than her own?

Begun under the eye of Alexander and enriched by each of his successors who, like the Pharaohs but with more refined taste, had a passion for building, Bruchium was not merely a palace. Situated on high ground where the hills along the sea-shore declined towards the sea, its numerous buildings formed a kind of separate town, an immense royal enclosure of unheard of variety and luxury in which specimens of massive Egyptian architecture mingled with graceful entablatures of Greek art. The portion occupied by Cleopatra had been specially arranged by Ptolemy Auletes in his desire to assure to his well-loved daughter artistic surroundings worthy of her. A lover of everything that was rare and beautiful, the musician, no less alive to refinement of mind than to that of sound, had been pleased to enrich it with all that was most perfect the hand of man could create. She could not move a step without encountering priceless works by Myron, Praxiteles and Phidias, finely carved candelabra, chairs of elegant contour, ivory cabinets loaded with incrustations, tripods wrought by the art of the silversmith for the burning of rare perfumes, and everywhere in profusion carpets of richly embroidered design like some wonderful dream. There was no single

room in that sumptuous dwelling-place which did not hold in reserve some joy of colour and form to charm the eye, or in which one did not feel that everything had been combined to give a noble enjoyment to life.

But the real marvel surpassing everything, and which could never have been found under any other sky than that of Egypt, were the gardens. Open to the breezes from the sea, one could there inhale them with delight. Terrace succeeded to terrace, interlinked by wide marble stairways and intersected by fountains whence flowed waters of crystal clearness. By means of this water, which was brought from the Nile by an aqueduct, vegetation reached a wonderful profusion, and fig-trees and palms, as well as plants brought at great expense from more temperate regions, flourished in this scintillating atmosphere. Everywhere flowers were in profusion, particularly roses, which had been brought from Persia in such quantities that even the *parterres* of Ecbatana would have seemed poor beside those which shed their perfume beneath the windows of the Queen.

How could the son of Venus whom political necessities had so often drawn to the cold of barbarous countries not have felt, even to intoxication, the novelty of such a sojourn? Everything seemed to contribute to some exceptional state of felicity, and more than all, this creature of grace and youth who was its choicest flower. From the first evening he loved her with one of those ardent, absolute passions which are like the burning heat of the sky when summer is nearing its close and the trees become more brilliant and richer than they have been all through the season.

✓ As for Cleopatra, she let herself be loved. The loss of her kingdom, her exile, and the fear of worse treatment, had prepared her to be very yielding. Without questioning the nature of the feeling which threw her into the arms of Cæsar, without even perceiving the element of bargaining which it introduced, she was full of joy over her success. And how many times on thinking

it over had she not felt a right to congratulate herself when, having only sought in him a protector, she had found in addition the most enraptured, the most charming of lovers! Secure in the ship with its high bulwarks whither he had placed her alongside the walls, she abandoned herself to his strong guardianship and gave herself up to a power of which she could not distinguish the elements. If he did not agitate the secret sources of her being, this great man's love filled her with so much pride and awakened in her such magnificent hopes that her heart took no account of its want of reciprocity. Dreaming of a wondrous future, she rejoiced in feeling herself carried on towards destinies which were unknown indeed, but with such a pilot as Cæsar could not fail to be glorious.

Although disturbed by the noise of the catapults and the sound of falling bolts from the engines of war with which the attacking forces were battering at the walls of Bruchium, the days which the two lovers passed there as prisoners were exquisite. Seeing only themselves, and with their one thought to please and lavish caresses on each other, they realised to the full extent that dream of *solitude à deux* which so many couples in the enjoyment of freedom seek in vain.

The reinforcements, however, which Cæsar had summoned were beginning to come in. Cilicians and Rhodians were bringing to Alexandria ships laden with supplies which the channel remaining in the possession of the besieged garrison permitted to reach them; well-drilled foot soldiers were furnished by Gaul; Rome was sending the armaments, and cavalry under the command of Calvinus completed the effective force. The siege which had lasted for more than six months was then raised and the war was carried into the flat open country. The army commanded by Achilles was not such a negligible quantity as might have been supposed. Several times skilful manœuvres were successful in placing Cæsar in a difficult position. None the less what was

bound to happen—for he had on his side the advantage of numbers and the valour of Rome—took place when he was able to deploy his cohorts on the plains of the Delta. A decisive battle was delivered and, beaten, overthrown, and hurled into the Nile, the troops of Ptolemy were annihilated. The king himself met his death as he was endeavouring to cross the river by an improvised dam. More pitiful than fate Cæsar granted Achilles his life when he was brought before him loaded with chains. He contented himself with demanding his surrender and then at a gallop took the road to Alexandria.

✓ Cleopatra was waiting on the seventh story of the tower. When she saw the eagles glittering in the midst of a cloud of dust, her heart beat quickly, and unable to contain her joyful impatience, she commanded her litter.

“Run!” she ordered the porters, and forthwith twelve Ethiopians strained their bronzed limbs along the road.

The royal litter could be recognised from afar by the golden sparrow-hawk which soared high on its roof, and by the purple curtains covering it. As soon as her approach was signalled Cæsar got off his horse, and with the tender respect which characterised his gallantry, saluted his well-beloved. He had not seen her for several days and was burning to give expression to his love.

✓ “Egypt is thine,” he said; “I have conquered but to lay her at thy feet. Lo here!” And with these words he tendered her the keys of the capital which Achilles had surrendered when making his submission.

Henceforth acquainted with the full weight of the Roman power, the rebels were able to estimate the folly into which Photinus had drawn them. Though previously they had held their heads high, on this day they bowed low. They were expecting reprisals, ~~as only~~ an amnesty had been arranged. Who would

have thought of quarrelling about the Queen whom so generous a conqueror had imposed upon them? On her first appearance in public she was acclaimed as if her presence were the crowning hope of all hearts.

Thanks then to this war which had been waged for love of her, Cleopatra recovered the crown of her ancestors. With a view, nevertheless, of achieving the conquest of public opinion, she submitted for the second time to the old dynastic usage which enjoined that the children of the same father should divide the sovereignty, and accepted her younger brother Ptolemy XV. as her consort.

Everything having thus been settled for the best, it only remained for Cæsar to leave Egypt and repair to Rome where his party were calling for him. But Cæsar was no longer his own master. Entirely possessed by that passion which to the end of his life was to inspire all his acts, press fresh duties upon him, and incite ambitions which contributed to his ruin, he put off his departure. Closing his ears to the warnings which each despatch brought him, he listened only to the fair cajoler who, to all the charming witcheries she had already employed to keep him, now added the suggestion of a journey.

In those days, as at the present time, navigation along the banks of the Nile, where were scattered and are still scattered, traces of the ancient days of the Pharaohs, was a much appreciated pleasure. Many wealthy patricians, princes from the East, and artists from Asia Minor and Greece, after having exhausted the delights of Alexandria embarked on one of those pleasure boats which went by the name of *canges* or *thalameges*, and for weeks under an ever clear sky passed their time in restful indolence.

The *cange* to which Cleopatra invited Cæsar was a veritable floating palace. The luxurious apartments at Bruchium were reproduced in miniature and numerous other *thalameges* accompanied them carrying a large

retinue not only of servants, but dancers, musicians and poets to charm their leisure hours.

It was at the beginning of winter, which elsewhere plunges humanity under doleful frost, when fields are in mourning and the poor shivering trees wave their arms in distress. There was none of this dreariness on the indolent blue waterway followed by the travellers. Borne along by the rhythmic labour of fifty Nubians bending over oars of ebony, they moved forward intoxicated with their freedom and the joy of space towards some Promised Land which at each stage offered them a more generous tribute of the sun.

After the wonderful verdure of the first days, vegetation became rare. The *cange* now threaded its way between bare banks. The wide expanse, sandy as far as the horizon, became merely a succession of little dry hillocks like silver spirals losing themselves in the haze. Here and there they passed clumps of aloes brandishing their keen, sword-like points, and the waving crests of date-palms in the dry air seemed like giant torches on the point of being set on fire. As they approached nearer to Memphis, buildings became more numerous—temples with thick short columns, palaces gleaming in their whiteness, and massive pylons like mountains were seen reflected in the river. Over against the Pyramids the travellers halted. The marvellous toil which had reared these tombs dumfounded Cæsar. He who as a follower of Plato attached little importance to the body, and believed that to attain immortality a man need only take into account the beauty radiating from the mind, from love, and from the lofty actions of the soul, asked himself what thoughts had haunted the brain of a Cheops or a Kephrem before death? Had they considered it as the real life, and our life here as but a passage? Had they raised temples in order to honour Death, or, indignant at its destroying hand, was it in defiance that their pride had reared these awe-inspiring triangles?

Among the many strange objects with which the plains of Memphis are strewn, the great Sphinx at Gizeh attracted their curiosity. Cleopatra had seen it from afar during her adventurous flight and found it pleasing to show the contrast of her grace and diminutiveness in the presence of Cæsar. When they came close to it the sun was finishing its course behind the Libyan hills. Resting on its bed of sand the monstrous figure seemed to stand out from some limitless shore in a solid sea. While the enigmatic face, turned towards the East, was now already shrouded in shadow, its tawny-coloured spine caught the last rays of brightness which made it as it were a living thing. Mindful at that moment of that other Sphinx which Oedipus, troubled over his fate, had one day interrogated, did the Dictator, before whom also lay an anxious future, pause to put some question to it? Did he obtain an answer? A mystery! But quivering as he was at the contact of the young living form by his side while gazing at the rose-tinted moon and drinking in the perplexing soul of night, had perchance any wise counsel been wafted to him he was in no mind to listen to it. Love spoke too loudly.

On the thirtieth day of their journey the lovers arrived before Philæ. This pearl, set in the blue of the atmosphere and of the water, both so pure and transparent that one might ask which of them mirrored the other, had inspired poets from all time. Those who had once approached its threshold, pink as a cockle-shell, never wearied of singing the praises of this sweet paradise. To stay there, to pitch one's tent and to forget in the worship of beauty all that elsewhere offends against or tarnishes it, at once seizes hold of the artistic imagination, but few were able to realise this joy, for from most remote antiquity the limited extent of the island belonged to the priests of Isis who did not willingly allow entry to the profane. As guardians of the temple which the piety of the faithful had made the richest in Egypt, these servants of the beneficent goddess were loth to be

disturbed in any of their privileges and took care not to share with others a revenue which had not its like elsewhere.

As happens in the greater number of sanctuaries wherein preoccupation with matters divine does not set at naught the good things of the world, the arrival of the sovereigns was hailed with enthusiasm. Boats carrying musicians descended the river for many *stadia* to meet them and on the bank a gathering of priests singing chants awaited their coming. They were constrained to enter the temple and receive deputations and offerings. In token of thanksgiving goats were sacrificed and the blood of doves was shed.

After this official reception, which it would not have been possible for them to avoid, Cleopatra expressed a wish that she and Cæsar should be left alone, free from all ceremonial. During the heat of the day they remained within the porticoes where jets of water diffused a little coolness, either beguiling their time watching the blue, white, and rose-coloured calixes of the lotus open their petals, or wrapped in a soft stillness in which all anxieties, projects, and ambitions were forgotten. The young queen, however, did not lose sight of the secret end of this journey which was to attach the great Protector by unforgettable impressions to Egypt. One evening, after passing along the alley-ways and drinking in the scent of tropical violets giving forth an odour as of honey, they buried themselves in the thick brushwood whose branches curving over their heads let fall their golden pollen, and in a tone of childlike simplicity she replied to the compliments he addressed her. "Yes, my country is indeed the fairest in the world, but how difficult to govern!" And deeply moved at feeling her fragile form by his side he hastened to promise her the constant and powerful support of his fatherland.

Unable to prolong this truce from public life any longer the lovers wished at least to perpetuate its happy memory. The plan of a temple was designed, and

before leaving the island they laid the first stone within an enclosure of rhododendrons where birds were sporting, dazzling as a flash of light. Twenty centuries have rolled away, and pilgrims who come one after the other to this paradise of Philæ still marvel at a graceful marble colonnade, delicate and light in its pure Corinthian style. The name of no divinity is inscribed on the front, but everyone can guess to whom this voluptuous masterpiece was dedicated.

A delegation was awaiting Cæsar at Alexandria. When Rome had learnt that the victor of Pharsalia, the hero to whom had rallied so many hopes, was lingering beside a new Circe, consternation was general. Did he imagine that he was protected from the changes of fortune? Might not all that his luck and genius had brought about be undone by his neglect? What would happen if Pompey's partisans, with the knowledge that their enemy was engaged in an adventure of gallantry, mobilised fresh troops? Even now the boldest were lifting up their heads and the menace was becoming general.

Soft as the pillow of a woman's breast might be, a man of Cæsar's temper will nevertheless bestir himself when his friends let him know that his honour is in peril. At the call of those who had come to seek him the lover experienced a rebound. He realised that all those great deeds he had performed would come to naught if he did not respond to the appeal made to him that day. He must depart. He would leave, but he must be allowed time to prepare her for the separation, for she too had placed her full confidence in him.

With all the forethought of anxious tenderness he broke the news to Cleopatra.

"What!" she moaned, "art thou willing to unloose the arms which I have clasped around thy neck?" And with a warm embrace she sought to retain him.

Though strong in face of the whole world, Cæsar felt himself weak before the woman he loved. He was on

the point of yielding. Happily there came back to his memory the maxim that ruled his life. "Everywhere, ever the foremost," and his courage stiffened. Besides, he was not one of those hardened voluptuaries with whom instinct alone finds utterance. His transcendent nature required action; the excitement of public life had become a necessity. "I am accustomed," he said to himself, "to regard men as a vile herd; am I from cowardly inaction to make myself like those I despise?"

The Queen nevertheless was disconsolate at the thought of losing him. If he were far away what would become of her? Who would protect and defend her? Who would aid her in subduing her turbulent and cunning people?

She was about to become a mother. Relying on this fresh link between herself and her lover, she obtained from him a promise that he would not leave before the birth of the child.

In reality Cæsar was not indifferent to this forthcoming event. The thoughts which he expressed were even of a kind to arouse the greatest hopes in the mind of Cleopatra. Sometimes it was regret that none of the three wives he had married had presented him with a son and, what was more poignant, that he had lost his daughter Julia; and sometimes it was anxiety as to the disposal of his fortune. To whom would pass his great wealth and the vast estates he possessed in Umbria? Who would carry on the divine race of Julius? Certainly his sister Atia had a son Octavius, but this nephew was of delicate health, and the uncertain and timid character of which he gave evidence afforded no grounds for presaging a brilliant destiny. Who could say whether the little bastard which Cleopatra had in store for him might not be better endowed for the attainment of glory?

The child was born on the very eve of the day when, tired of waiting, Cæsar's friends had at last obtained his consent to weigh anchor. It was a son. What wonderful

fortune that on the scarcely-formed features of the little one an undeniable resemblance to the father shone forth ! Deeply moved as are the hearts of those beginning to grow old, the great general decided that the child should be called Cæsarion, and promised to adopt it. This was not all. At the touching hour of farewell, at an interview full of regrets and outpourings, Cleopatra gave expression to the wish which possessed her whole soul : " O Cæsar, that I may be thy wife ! " Under the little forehead, again accustomed to wear a crown, her ambitions had little by little grown wider. It was no longer enough for her to rule over the kingdom of her ancestors—diminished as it was and reduced to being little more than a commercial power ; her dream was now to unite her lot with that of the lord of Rome.

This prospect at first somewhat startled Cæsar. Was not Calpurnia, his lawful wife, waiting his return on the Aventine, where his palace rose ? And was not Cleopatra herself married and held captive by a dynastic custom ? But what were obstacles like these to the young woman who had taken the measure of the world and had not found it too vast for her designs ? She laid stress on what they might be able to realise together, strong in a pact which would place in common the limitless wealth of the one and the genius for war of the other. The scheme was grandiose and held out something to attract Cæsar. He at once saw its advantages, which were so perfectly in tune with his love. But would Rome permit him to carry it out ? There was a law, one of those which the Senate still strictly guarded, forbidding patricians to marry foreigners. " Art thou not above the laws ? " insinuated the loving voice of the temptress. And what man can resist when he hears himself placed in the ranks of the gods ?

It was the moment of departure. Cæsar gave her a last embrace. He made no formal promise, but in bidding farewell to her lover Cleopatra felt the added solemnity of a betrothal.

Her imagination grew excited in her solitude ; glorious visions possessed her mind. She seemed to behold Rome humiliated and subject to the will of Alexandria, with vassals coming to lay their arms and the keys of their capitals at her feet. Nations without number were defiling past, and among the acclamations she seemed to hear her own name mingled with that of Cæsar. It is by mirages like these that a wilderness becomes transformed and ceases to be a desolate, arid plain ; the changing stages come nearer and the end hoped for seems to be more vivid than the dismal reality.

No sooner had he escaped from the spell under which the large and velvety eyes of the Egyptian had wrapped him than Cæsar recovered himself and again became the penetrating, lucid, and decisive man of action. His eagle eye took in everything at a glance. Matters were very different from the state of affairs brought about by his success at Pharsalia. The army of Pompey had had time to reorganise, no longer feeling that Cæsar was invincible. It threatened him on all sides. The great general therefore set sail for Asia Minor before returning to Italy, and made a beginning by freeing himself from the fleet of the enemy covering the mouth of the Cydnus ; then, with a body of tried veterans from whom he could ask prodigies of valour, he beat Caius Cassius at Ephesus, and Pharnacus at Zela ; then returning towards Africa, he won the battle of Thapsus, and after making the terrified petty sovereigns pay huge sums which he demanded in exchange for restoring to them their kingdoms, he returned to Rome laden with booty wherewith to assuage the malcontents.

A triumph awaited Cæsar, a triumph such as the Sacred Way had never before witnessed. Seeing him crowned with laurels and followed by a procession of captive kings, among them, greater than all, the illustrious Vercingetorix personifying the resistance of the Gauls, people forgot their complaints. His long absence was forgiven. Around his chariot on which was

written in letters of gold the famous *veni, vidi, vici*, surged a crowd with the enthusiasm of children who have just found their father again. The higher classes, however, showed more reserve, and it was to the people that the Dictator turned for his support, directing his first reforms to ameliorating their conditions. But he knew too well how easily crowds are moved and how sudden are the changes to which their fickleness exposes them, to limit himself to wise and meritorious measures only. To keep the plebeians amused had always been the surest method of having them on his side. In every quarter of the city he therefore bestowed lavish supplies of corn, and oil and wine was poured into their open mouths. Public fêtes were organised and the circus soon became filled with a crowd for whom the blood of beasts and gladiators was prodigally shed. During the forty days during which the orgy lasted there was but one opinion : Cæsar was the *Illustrious*, the *Invincible*, the *Beloved Father of his Country*. Every title, every honour was bestowed on him. He was made Consul, Dictator for ten years, and received the insignia of High Priest. His Curule chair was raised above that of others, and the word *Deus* was inscribed on the statue erected to him in the Temple of Jupiter.

But matters were not going so well at Alexandria. In spite of the legions left there under the command of Calvinus, seditious movements were formed. They accused the Queen, more or less openly, of having brought a foreigner to Egypt, of having given them a Roman as their lord, and of having compromised the honour of the dynasty in acknowledging him as the father of her child. Would she presume to impose on Egyptians a future king not of their own race ? But accusations are of little account to those who are strong enough to ignore them. Cleopatra was not yet, however, the intrepid woman who, later on, was to brave public opinion, and herself lead armies into battle. Her twenty years were as yet unhardened and she trembled at feeling the breath of

revolution around her. Bereft of the protector who had restored her throne and had made her respected, she felt herself vacillating. Could she always hold her own against these secret plots, recriminations and outbreaks? Up to now the *prestige* of Cæsar, though absent, had sufficed to protect her. If however the agitators came to believe that she had been abandoned by him and reduced to rely only on her own resources, what might they not attempt? Moreover, evil reports had been spread abroad. Did not people say that during his African expedition the great general had found distraction with Queen Eunoe? Could he! So soon after he had left her bed whereon he had sworn eternal fidelity! Ah, how defenceless does a woman feel when distance renders vain the embrace of those arms which were dissevered at parting!

But surely this distance was not beyond her reach. If, in very truth, as he wrote, Cæsar continued to love her, and suffered too from being kept so far away, why should she not rejoin him? With the desire of binding yet closer the links uniting them (if indeed they had become relaxed) there mingled also a curiosity to see Rome—that mighty hereditary enemy, that rival ever to be distrusted. When seen at closer quarters a rival sometimes causes less apprehension and one learns methods of circumventing her. And so Cleopatra proposed to visit Rome.

After a year of separation it was in fact true, as his letters protested, that the sentiments of Cæsar had not changed. If he had paid attention to the Queen of Numidia it was but a passing fancy springing from a desire to distract his mind from a memory which occupied too great a place in his thoughts. Burdened as he was by grave duties, had a man the right to allow himself to be absorbed by amorous visions? And in very truth, sometimes even with an intensity whereof his mind was no longer master, he saw over and over again those passionate scenes at Bruchium, those happy hours

lulled by the slow waters of the Nile. He did not, however, agree all at once to the proposed journey. To summon the Queen of Egypt to Rome was a serious matter. He was unwilling to run the risk until all difficulties had been smoothed over. The first and the hardest to overcome was the antipathy of the Roman people to anyone wearing a crown. One might even say that the sentiment was so deep-rooted that the first approach of a sovereign seemed to their minds to threaten them with a monarchy. Now Cleopatra, more than any other, was held suspect. They knew her to be ambitious, and all were aware of the seduction in which she had enveloped Cæsar. In order to exculpate the one they accused the other and charged her with the responsibility. Must not a woman be possessed of very strange powers to have been able to keep the Emperor so long away from his country, from his own people who called for him?

Cæsar asked himself if it were prudent to bring his mistress into the midst of so jealous a public opinion? He dared not expose her to a hostile reception and still less did he dare to leave his enemies, whom he felt were ready to use against him the shortest absence, in order to go and see her. And the days went by, and Cleopatra lamented.

In the end, the idea which was to extricate them from their difficulties, came from her. Under the pretext that the conditions of her alliance with Rome had never been properly settled, she offered to come in person to discuss several clauses that were in dispute. It was by no means necessary that the Queen should take this trouble to obtain the right to call herself *socius reipublicæ*; ambassadors from both sides would have sufficed; but the Senate was flattered that she preferred to treat directly with them, and replied by an invitation. The cast had been thrown and there was nothing further to do than to start on her journey. Was it not Cleopatra's destiny to bring men into subjection to her will?

A June sun was brilliantly shining. With the Forum agog with excitement, windows crowded, and the populace massed on each side of the principal streets, Rome was on holiday. Distrust, however, rather than cordiality, was the prevailing note of all this excitement. So many strange stories about the expected visitor were going round. To some she was a kind of courtesan shimmering in pearls and gold; to others a sorceress whose evil practices caused those who approached her to lose their reason. To the greater number, Cleopatra was simply the foreigner, the woman from the East, in other words, she was what the Romans held in the greatest contempt in all the world.

When the procession came in sight,—black slaves with rings in their ears, eunuchs clad like women in long robes, attendants with their cumbersome head-dresses, and half-naked soldiers whose heads crowned with *antennæ* looked like huge insects,—there were bursts of laughter. Sarcastic remarks followed on the appearance of astronomers whose pointed hats menaced the sky, and priests muffled up in skins of panthers; these outbursts redoubled at the sight of standards on which were depicted the sacred emblems. "What! jackals! sparrow-hawks! cows!" And the Latin sense rose up against a religion that had fallen to the level of such symbols.

But see, here in the centre of glittering lances and bucklers the royal litter was advancing! Silence fell, all eyes were fixed on Cleopatra with the child in her arms. It was upon that child, about whom Alexandria had raised a grievance, upon his sweet smile and his marvellous resemblance to Cæsar, that she had counted on gaining a good welcome from the Romans. And she had not calculated in vain. At that time Cæsar was the idol of Rome. All his actions were applauded, and if under their breath there were some who railed at him and passed criticisms amongst themselves, no one would have dared to express themselves openly against anyone

whom he had invited. Notwithstanding, the Queen of Egypt, beautiful as she was, could not be pleasing to a population infatuated with themselves, who deemed their race superior to all others. With her amber-coloured skin, her eyes elongated with antimony so as to almost reach her temples, her lips heavy with paint, the strangeness of her head-dress in which was entwined a golden serpent, and her transparent tunic which left her bosom uncovered, the personality of Cleopatra shocked and scandalised them. But inasmuch as word had been given to be friendly they only saw, or pretended only to see, the little Cæsarion whose clear skin, and quick, intelligent eye proclaimed his divine origin.

In order to show publicly the relation which these two were to occupy in regard to himself, Cæsar installed them in the palace he had just constructed on the left bank of the Tiber to which he added the use of the magnificent gardens spread out on the flank of the Janiculum. These gardens had been made over to the people by his testamentary dispositions—a generous gift which drew the populace to kneel weeping before his blood-stained toga on the morrow of his death.

On finding herself at last the guest of Rome, Cleopatra experienced that deep sense of satisfaction which comes after struggles from which one has emerged victorious. In spite of obstacles, she had successfully achieved the first part of her enterprise. The question now was to devise means to accomplish the most difficult part, namely, to bring her lover to the end she so much desired, a marriage which would make her twice over a queen. For a woman gifted as she was, and adroit in bringing all her seductions to bear, no one could have dreamed of a more appropriate scene of action than that whither fate had conducted her. At the time of her arrival Rome was no longer that austere city where each citizen was vowed to the worship of old institutions, amid his Lares and his family. These institutions which had formed the strength and the grandeur of the Republic,

but also her barbarism, were beginning to lose their power. Religion was declining. Officially practised, it encountered a large amount of incredulity, especially among the higher classes. If the people still preserved their fear of the gods, they made light of transgressing their laws and of despoiling on occasion their sanctuaries, like that cynical soldier who boasted of having purloined the statue of Diana Anaitides in Armenia and of having built up his fortune by this theft. The indissolubility of marriage no longer existed. Every day Senators and Consuls were seen to repudiate their wives without any honest pretext. Had not Cicero himself, the best and kindest of men, after thirty years of married life, in order to substitute in her place quite a young girl, just spoken to Terentia those cruel words of divorce: "Go outside and take back what is thine own"? A disordered state of morals was everywhere prevalent and mingled together all ranks of society in the pursuit of pleasure. The unprecedented scandal of Equites descending into the arena and measuring their lances with those of gladiators had been witnessed at one of the recent games in the circus. The excessive fortunes made during the wars were an outrage to the simple habits of former days. Everywhere it was gold that asserted its royalty. From the temples in which in primitive times it had been used in decoration and in adding pomp, it had now passed to private houses; furniture, vaulted roofs, walls—all were resplendent, everything was gilded. In vain had Cato walked about with bare feet and a torn tunic as a protest against the luxury of his contemporaries. His example had no effect; people laughed at him and the carriages continued to roll by. Shaking off the *Lex Oppia*, women no longer placed any bounds on the luxury of their *toilette*. Around their arms, entwined in their hair, even on their shoes, delicate Etruscan jewellery might be admired, and on their necks sparkled precious stones which men went at great cost in ships to India to seek at the bottom of caves. The repasts served at

the tables of rich patricians were like those of Lucullus, and silver vessels, deeply chased vases, and couches with purple coverings might vie with those of Oriental kings. In a word, sobriety, economy and endurance—those rude virtues which had stamped the countenance of the Romans of old were in process of passing to the land of legend.

However, if the old framework of society was foundering and was giving place to a new era, it must be confessed that the pleasing amenities of life gained much from the change. Never before had cultivation of the mind and taste for art been so widespread. With her philosophies, her statuary, even her language—which fashionable people flattered themselves in speaking well—Greece had taken a new birth in Rome. No young man of good family finished his education without a sojourn at Rhodes, Appollonia and above all Athens. The ideas they brought back became the fashion. Whereas a knowledge of the *chefs-d'œuvre* of literature remained the well-nigh exclusive privilege of a few, the profession of writing had led to copies being made and these had now reached to the upper ranks of society. It had become the correct thing to frequent the society of intellectual men. Many patrician houses held it an honour to entertain a *savant*, or a philosopher, and it was a much-prized novelty to listen in their homes to the suave pastorals which flowed from the lips of young Virgil, recently come from Mantua, or to the first poems which at the age of twenty Horace was beginning to forge on his resounding anvil, poems destined to re-echo for so long and so far. In a word, wheresoever and from whatsoever source it burst forth, talent was esteemed and lacked not admirers.

Cleopatra at once saw the rôle which her personality could play in a society with its doors open to whatever was new, original and seductive. Perhaps more than any other woman she was able to draw to her house men of superior talent, no matter from what quarter they

came, and in the exercise of a charm of mind unequalled either among those who were busy with household cares, or among courtesans whose conversation was for the most part frivolous and obscene, had she not every chance of success? So in the centre of the vast *atrium* to which her personal taste had added the tempting luxury of divans, carpets, and bright-coloured hangings, she made a beginning by inviting Cæsar's intimate friends. Happy in being again with the one who was to bring the last joy to his life, the great general came there every evening to relax his mind by relating to her the cares of politics, and while waiting for the hour when supple and fragrant with perfume she was to press against his heart, he liked to talk to his friends.

The most constant visitors from the first were Trebonius, Lepidus, Sulpicius Rufus, Curio and other Senators with whom he held ideas in common. Together they debated the questions of the day—how to carry out the promises given to the soldiers, the suppression of debts, the exemption of taxes on rents below two thousand *sesterces*—and on all these difficult matters they were astonished at hearing the young woman, who seemed only to be there to light up the atmosphere with her brilliant eyes and to attract them with the sound of her clinking bangles, give forth judicious opinions showing on every subject a penetrating and sagacious judgment. Their surprise was no less amazing when they heard her chatting with the historian Sallust, whose works, bristling with stern truth and biting psychology, she had read and was able to appreciate; with Asinius Pollio, who took pleasure in submitting to her his speeches and also the ironical little poems in which he twitted the foibles of his fellow-citizens through the mouths of shepherds; with Atticus, the archæologist, in whose discoveries she took a keen interest, whether he unfolded before her eyes some delicately coloured leaves of Persian imagery, an ivory polished by the patient hand of some Chinaman, or some fragments of a *bas-relief* which had fallen from

a temple at Ephesus. And how was it possible for them not to be moved on seeing her bending over a chart of the heavens on which a congress of scientists were working to effect a reform of the calendar, and following attentively the course of the Great Bear, Cassiopeia, and Orion round the Polar Star? Of a truth she was an exceptional creature, one of those beings whom the goddesses seemed to have chosen to represent them on earth.

It was at this time that the young, handsome, and celebrated Marcus Antonius was presented to her. He had arrived from Spain freshly crowned with laurels won at Munda and his chariots laden with booty. A reputation for incomparable bravery shone like a star on his brow. With his athletic frame, his merry laugh like Dionysus wherewith he enlivened a banquet, and the prodigality of his expenditure, he presented an heroic figure like fabled Hercules from whom he claimed descent. Although at this time the lover of the courtesan Cytheris, the young man was deeply stirred by the disconcerting beauty of Cleopatra and nothing less than the very sincere friendship which united him to Cæsar held back those words of love which pressed hard upon his lips. But he was never to forget the queenly grace with which the enchantress offered him her little hand to kiss, or the sudden pang he felt on hearing her speak, or even the smallest detail of their first interview.

While, however, impassioned admirers were celebrating the new Aspasia in that sanctuary of art and literature, the palace on the banks of the Tiber, there were murmurings from without. These came from virtuous folk, or from those who pretended to be so, who were indignant at this *liaison* openly acknowledged, accepted, and honoured by the Dictator. Among these were all the women in high society. Having for the most part to deplore the disgraceful conduct of their own husbands, these embittered wives leagued themselves together and pursued with jealous hatred the woman from the East

with her unfettered morals, whose house was overflowing with men by whom they had been deserted. But Cleopatra's worst foes were her political enemies. Deeply attached to their traditions of past centuries the conservative element could not view without misgivings these new ideas which more and more were tending to encroach upon the spirit of old. Although they had had occasion to note for a long time past the disposition which was personally drawing the Dictator towards sovereign power, and the pomp with which he loved to surround himself, it was on his royal mistress that they cast the responsibility. If he was turning away from their venerable customs, from respect for their laws and from everything of which they were the properly constituted guardians, they laid the blame on the Egyptian woman.

Perhaps not altogether unknown to her, Cæsar was certainly deviating, day by day, and more and more, from Republican principles. He had just had his Dictatorship prolonged without just cause, since the wars were over. And now supreme arbiter, he issued his decrees on every matter of State, nominated officials on his sole authority, and apportioned confiscated lands to whomsoever he pleased. Where would his power stop short? Even the title of King would have added nothing to it; notwithstanding, everyone felt that he coveted the title and would seize upon the first opportunity to assume it. Far from using conciliatory methods with his colleagues, such as former Consuls, Pontiffs and Senators might justly have laid claim to, one might even have said that he took pleasure in defying them by showing publicly how antiquated their views had become. With a kind of effrontery broken loose from the prejudices of his class, which his lordly manner exhaled, it pleased him to mock at the stern morality of Cato and to cast doubt upon everything, even upon the gods. Had he not gone so far as to utter before the Senate in full session (among other imprudent words) the

following remark at which many had felt outraged : "The Republic is henceforth a name that has no meaning !"

Foremost amongst those who were sincerely alarmed was Cicero. At that time the great orator held a position next to Cæsar as first citizen of Rome. He was, moreover, one of the most straightforward and honoured of men. His liberal views had attached him formerly to Pompey's party, and since the defeat of the latter he had retired to his villa at Tusculum, where he passed his days in seclusion and disgust. It had been a very lively regret to Cæsar that he had lost the friendship of this great-hearted man who was held in respect by all and who would have made a valued collaborator. The holding aloof of such an important man hurt the pride of Cleopatra no less. How to draw him to her house, to number him amongst those who paid their court to her, and to make him an ally against the day when Cæsar would have to transgress the law in her favour, became a veritable obsession to her charming despotism.

She opened her mind to Atticus whom close friendship united to Cicero. Much attached to the Queen of whose magnificent hospitality he was partaking, this amiable Epicurean took upon himself to win over his friend. No one was better qualified for the duties of an ambassador. To bring people together, to persuade and to unite them, was conformable to his conciliatory character. No doubt Atticus was also aided in his mission by the tediousness of life which lay chill on Cicero. For a man who had known the intoxication of power and had heard himself applauded until the pillars shook, retirement was a hard life to lead. Being obliged to listen to his friend extolling the pleasant company into which he desired to draw him, the homage which awaited Cicero, and above all—for he adored books—the magnificence of those possessed by Cleopatra, which would be at his disposal, the man of letters suffered himself to be tempted. Majestically arrayed in his toga (which no one better than

he knew how to arrange in folds over his shoulder), he appeared on the threshold which was ornamented with mosaics representing Orpheus playing the flute, and Cæsar hastened forward to meet him. Radiant on every occasion when one of her caprices had won the day, Cleopatra greeted her guest in the most flattering manner, and on the first evening displayed before his eyes everything in her opulent dwelling that could charm a delicate taste. Ancient parchments enriched with curious designs on which the history of the Pharaohs was inscribed were laid out on a table. The orator turned over the yellow leaves with his delicately-shaped hands, and while he uttered exclamations of wonder at the singularity of the characters that formed the Egyptian writing, the Queen in her musical and alluring voice explained to him their meaning. Seeing him attentive and manifestly charmed, she thought she had definitely won him over, and promised that the precious volumes should be conveyed to Tusculum on the morrow.

A conscience nevertheless of the quality of Cicero's could not so easily allow itself to be seduced. If, in the light of certain pledges that Cæsar had given to the conservative party he had been able to think for a moment that he would forsake his liberal notions, his subsequent revival of arbitrary proceedings left Cicero no illusions. Beyond a doubt the Republic was being hastened to its fall, and nowhere did the great patriot breathe an atmosphere more contrary to what had been the passion of his life than in the *atrium* on the Transtevere. Little by little he ceased to go there. And feeling now more free to give his opinion when Atticus came to enquire the reason of his absence (alluding doubtless to the guests of every kind—forceful but often vulgar people whom Cæsar sometimes introduced there for the sake of popularity) he answered thus: "I could not be happy in an atmosphere lacking refinement."

This defection and others which took place from his set did not fail to give Cæsar scope for thought. He

felt, not that imperative need for concessions such as would have been imposed on a mind less hardened than his, but the necessity of strengthening his authority by some brilliant exploit. To attain the summit at which he aimed the old-time weapons had perished; fresh achievements were required, more wars, something prodigious which would surpass all that he had accomplished.

In the pursuit of this end the country which appealed to his genius for enterprise and filled him with alluring visions, was Persia—that Persia over which had passed Alexander's long, forced marches. With its unending territory, its high plains giving pasture to peaceful cattle, its valleys washed by the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates rich in legend; with its hanging gardens, its palaces of porphyry, its temples supported on columns topped with effigies of men; with its marvellous carpets, its roses, its pottery—this kingdom of fabled dreams beckoned him and sent out an irresistible appeal. What a difference to impoverished and barbarous Gaul! If he could only plant his eagles there it would mean not only glory, a glory which would equal that of the great Macedonian conqueror, but also inexhaustible riches.

Cleopatra, even more than he, ardently supported this fair vision. Having no illusions in regard to the sentiments of which she was the object, she knew that she had nothing but the might of Cæsar on which to count in order to impose herself on the unbending aristocracy of Rome. To increase therefore that might, to extend it in the East on that side where it joined her own territory and there build a pedestal so high that from it his brow would radiate over the whole world, became the tactics of the young ruler. And though it would cause her regret to leave the palace where she had imperturbably played the rôle of a great Roman lady and rejoin the figure-head of a husband who had been imposed upon her, she made arrangements to depart.

It was no secret to anyone that on his return from

his distant campaign the Emperor would marry her and adopt the son she had borne to him. Some people even alleged that he would add the sceptre to his supreme power which already likened him to a monarch, and that his aim was to found an immense empire with Alexandria as its capital. These allegations angered the people and affected all that was dearest to their hearts—the supremacy of their own city. To threaten it with a division of power, an eclipse, was to arouse a storm of anger, and, as usual, the responsibility of these projects was laid to Cleopatra's account. Hatred redoubled against her, and in order to inflame the people her enemies invented and spread abroad the report that she was in the habit of saying by way of an oath: "As true as I shall reign one day on the Capitol." At this the people could contain themselves no longer. From half-uttered murmurs insults became public. Her litter had but to cross the street for people to hide themselves. They talked of nothing less than driving out the Egyptian woman and compelling her to go back to her land of crocodiles.

These hostile rumours came to the ear of Cæsar and he showed greater offence than at those raised against himself. What! To strike at one he had chosen! To utter disrespectful remarks at what touched himself! He would not allow it and, alluding to a group who had been specially denounced, he said: "You will see the lesson I shall give to these foul shuffling defamers!"

During his *levée* he summoned Timomachus, who had been working for the past month on a statue of the Queen in chryselephantine.

"What length of time dost thou require to finish thy work?"

The sculptor reflected, and computing that the incrustations with which it was to be enriched had not yet been begun he replied timidly:

"Two decades at least."

"I will give thee but three days," the Dictator

declared. "It is my will that within three days the statue be placed on its pedestal in the Temple of Venus Genetrix."

People knew too well Cæsar's autocratic temper, whose ebullitions were aggravated by a delicate and over-charged nervous system, to offer the least resistance, and so the ceremony of dedication took place with great pomp on the appointed day. And with rage at their hearts pontiffs, officials of every rank, and members of the aristocracy, had to bow their heads before the new goddess who had come to invade their temple.

Shortly afterwards, as if he were determined to know just how far he could brave public opinion, the Dictator thought out a fresh experiment. It was at the time of the *Lupercalia*, a kind of carnival during which young patricians ran about half-naked striking in fun the passers-by with padded leather thongs, under the pretext of bringing them good luck. In his capacity as High Priest, Cæsar presided. Seated in the Tribune on a curule chair of gold he had Cleopatra by his side. After the ground had been sprinkled with the blood of a goat and a dog, a custom exacted by the rites appertaining to the feast, he made to withdraw when, cleaving his way through the crowd Antony obtrusively held out a diadem to him. At this act a murmur arose as from the sea when a tempest is preparing. Cæsar felt that the moment was inopportune, and turned aside. But encouraged by the Queen, who perhaps had even suggested this comedy, Antony deliberately made the crown glitter. The murmuring increased in volume; it was now as if the sound of the wind had been submerged in the loud roar of the waves. Unmistakably, the right moment had not yet come. With a gesture more peremptory than the first, a gesture which this time could not leave any doubt, Cæsar threw back his head and rejected the tempting emblem. Everyone saw it; he refused to be a king.

Many of the spectators, deceived by the scene which

had just been enacted, applauded wildly. Others, more far-seeing and having perhaps caught sight of glances suggesting connivance, said amongst themselves: "Yea, doubtless he refuseth to-day in order to accept with better grace when he shall have returned bearing aloft the standards of victory."

And under cover a band of conspirators was formed.

It was the middle of the month consecrated to the god of War. Spring was close at hand. Driven by light gusts of wind little grey clouds were passing over the blue sky. The rustling trees were beginning to swell with sap and the slopes of the Seven Hills were growing green. At their feet the city was becoming indistinct in the pale twilight. It was the hour when everybody, their day's work ended, was going home; and Cæsar, who had been absorbed throughout the day with his military preparations, was hastening back to the joy of returning to his fair mistress.

Leaning on her elbow at the window from which she would be able to see his entry, Cleopatra was plunged in thought. In only a few more days they would be separated. While beyond the gates of the Caspian he would be making fresh conquests worthy of a great chieftain, she would have regained the banks of the Nile. This separation troubled her and confronted her with a sense of terrible isolation hard to define. However, she resigned herself, for she knew it to be inevitable. Was not glory as necessary to sovereigns as bread is to the people? As conqueror of Persia Cæsar would be undisputed master. No human power, nothing, would any longer be able to oppose the execution of their plans. He would place her on the throne of Nineveh and Babylon and proclaim her his wife. Together they would mount the Capitol, and this same Rome she had heard howling after her like some savage wolf, would be compelled to acclaim her.

It was on these stupendous vistas, on this dream of

Semiramis, that the thunderbolt of the Ides of March fell with dire atrocity. It was morning. Scarcely one hour back had Cæsar pressed her to his heart. By one of those mysterious forebodings sometimes making themselves felt at decisive moments, to which one should always give heed, she had tried to keep him back. "Why dost thou rise so early? Thou wert complaining of uneasiness. Remain and rest awhile." But he was awaited. From fear lest he might delay, Brutus had sent Cassius, and with unblenching countenance the traitor had explained that he must hasten, that there were many matters that morning at the Senate awaiting him.

It was there that the crime was to take place. A sudden hub-bub resounded against the walls. Passers-by stopped and asked each other what had happened? Soon the portico was seen to fill with blanched faces. Terrible news broke forth. Cæsar had just been assassinated. Lamentations arose on all sides but were soon borne down by the shouting of the murderers who, with dagger in hand, started up and cried: "We have avenged the Republic!"

Horror-struck, and not knowing what to believe, the crowd dispersed rapidly like a river that has burst its banks, and spread from one end of the city to the other. The dreadful news reached the most distant quarters in a moment. It brought with it disorder and consternation. Shops closed everywhere and many people sheltered their dismay behind the overhanging eaves of their windows. Everyone felt that an immense misfortune had befallen Rome and that others, perhaps many others, would be precipitated in its train.

For Cleopatra it meant overwhelming ruin. An abyss into which everything seemed to be swallowed up had just opened before her eyes. The universe had become void. She raised her arms to the sky, she implored, she gave herself up to despair. Could it be possible that such a calamity had happened? Alas, no

one gave answer ! In hours of distress there is naught but silence.

Armed bands however were running along the banks of the Tiber brandishing the *pileum*, the symbol of liberty. And on that beautiful spring morning insulting cries hurtled through the air. "Down with the Egyptian woman ! To death with her !" shouted those voices which in any age, all the world over, are heard in the hour of revolution. A few servants surrounded the Queen and made ready to defend her, but they were so distracted that it was useless to expect any real help.

Apollodorus alone, whose courage never failed in difficult moments, spoke with authority. "We must depart, we must at once leave this blood-stained city."

The character of Cleopatra was not however one which gave way before a threat. She started up. Her idea was to stand fast. Perhaps all was not lost. Cæsar would be avenged. A party was being organised, so they had just heard, with Antony at their head. He had loved Cæsar. Surely his friendship could not fail to respect his wishes—to recognise Cæsarion as his son, his heir. . . .

Illusion ! Illusion that might become fatal if she persisted. In the confusion which reigned, the life of the child, no less than that of the mother, was not safe. Menacing cries were redoubling. There was nothing else to do than to heed the counsel of Apollodorus. His resourceful devotion had everything in readiness for flight. By way of the garden, and heavily veiled, for she was surrounded on all sides by foes in ambush just as when four years earlier she had fared forth to offer her persecuted youth to Cæsar, Cleopatra quitted Rome. During her flight she felt at times that she would die of anguish. It seemed as if the ground would disappear under her feet. Horror ! Desolation ! Oh, to feel alone when one has had the lord of the world for a companion !

The thought made her courage fail. Nevertheless, against her heart lay the little head whereon were traced the features of the great man. She drew him closer and pressed her lips upon his forehead. No ! All was not lost. Hope was reborn.

CHAPTER II

ALEXANDRIA

FROM her capital to which she had returned broken down after the catastrophe of the Ides of March, Cleopatra, two years later, was watching the civil war by which the Roman world was rent. This bitter struggle which gave the advantage now to Cæsar's murderers, now to his avengers, engendered in her a succession of alternating moods. The emotion she felt was not however entirely sentimental. With regret for the great man who had so passionately loved her and the desire to see the monstrous assassination punished were mingled grave political cares. For about a century Egypt had been impossible to govern. Restless, corrupt, and sanguinary, she appeared to be but the prey of numerous competitors who disputed her throne. In order to maintain herself, to utilise the magnificent resources of her soil and to overcome the bands of pirates, deserters, exiles, and convicts who had broken loose, of whom for the most part the army was composed, authority was necessary and this the Lagides no longer possessed. Incapable of the least effort these *dilettante* rulers had acquired the habit of calling on Rome for aid every time a fresh insurrection broke out. Ptolemy Auletes had only recovered his crown through the agency of money distributed among the Senators, and as for Cleopatra we have seen the events which had given her back her crown.

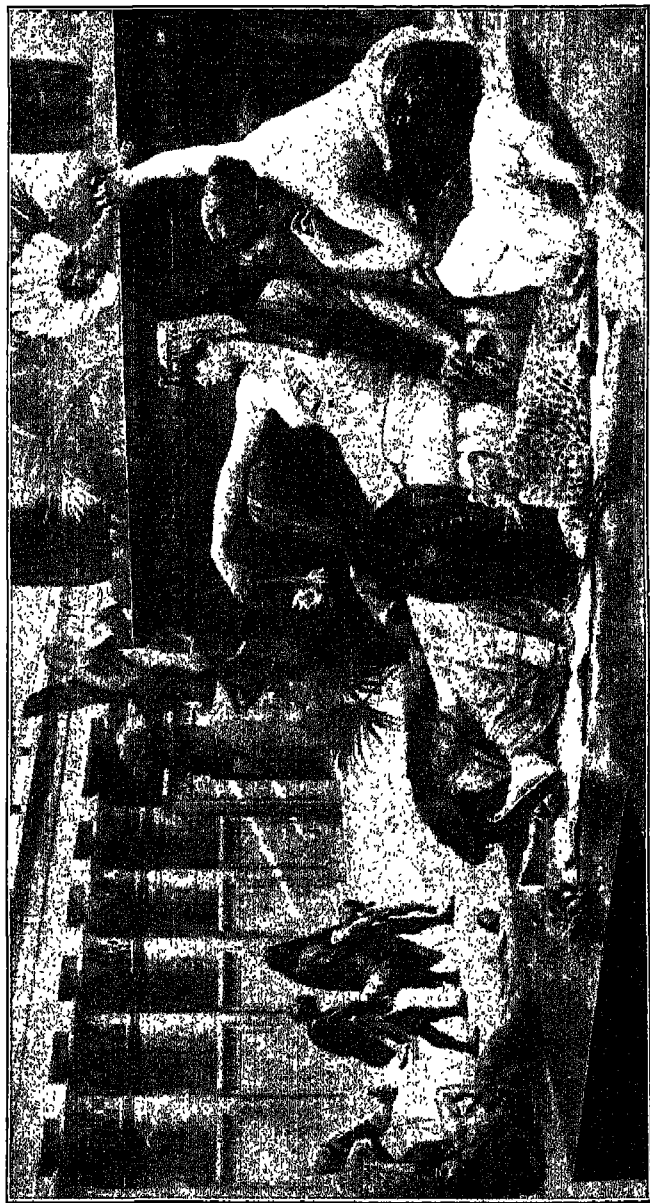
Though the tranquillity she had achieved had had beneficial effects and her people boasted of a certain amount of prosperity, many deplored that this had been restored at the price of a public scandal and by an alliance which any day might be changed into a domination. Seeing herself thus left alone, surrounded by opposition and intrigue, and deprived of the legions which had been withdrawn for the requirements of the war, the Queen had days of extreme depression. She felt its full weight when her ministers came to deliver their reports of the ravages caused by the epidemics of pestilence which were indeed so terrible that the embalmers were no longer sufficient for their task, and the dead were left to putrefy on the public ways ; of the famine which for the past two seasons had been ravaging the country, and again of the waste caused by a rapacious and corrupt bureaucracy—in fact all these anxieties connected with the difficult task of governing which were renewed day by day. She sighed and thought of the time when the great man's love had freed her from anxieties, when she had only to raise her ivory sceptre for every wish to be granted.

What was left of the old alliance to-day ? It was Rome rather who needed it. She was challenging her claims in other quarters, and in the disorder in which she now found herself both factions had in their turn implored the help of the Egyptian fleet. If Cleopatra had not responded to these appeals it was because she asked herself to which side she should listen. To which party would the Republic belong to-morrow ? If the conspirators should prevail it was clear that the kingdom of Egypt, left in the lurch as it was, together with Hellas, Syria, Gaul, Spain and Mauretania, would become like one of the subject provinces of the Mediterranean. If on the other hand, the opposite side won the day, she could await developments. Could it be possible that any former friends of Cæsar, calling themselves the continuators of his policy, would refuse to safeguard the

woman whom the Dictator had already called his wife, and the child upon whom nature had implanted his likeness? But *who* would get the upper hand? In continually asking herself this question Cleopatra was wearing out her nerves, and her consternation was indeed great on learning that the armies of Cassius were occupying strong positions in Macedonia. Winter, too, with its fogs and storms, had set in, navigation had ceased, and they were now without further news.

The view over Alexandria, so crowded with memories and fears, plunged the young woman into profound reveries. It was in this ever-brimming cup that she slaked her thoughts. Often at the hour when the horizon began to grow light, or when the magic of the setting sun spread forth its purple rays, she mounted one of the terraces cut in the slopes of Bruchium and gazed over the golden city. How fair it looked under its sky of fire, on the edge of its yellow shore, guarded by night by the gigantic torches of its lighthouse! And how it had been beautified since the days when its great founder had marked out its plan and designed the outline of its walls in the form of a Macedonian *chlamys*! The ruler of such a city might well be proud. On whatever side she cast her eyes there was nought but marble, domes of enamel or pottery ware, triumphal gateways, and frontons divided in noble symmetry. On the top of a small hillock rose the *Paneum*, aptly called the Cage of the Muses. It was here, in obedience to a very old tradition to which the Lagides remained strongly attached, that poets, musicians, painters, and sculptors found generous hospitality, provided that as masters of their arts they found favour with the daughters of Apollo.

In the centre of its colonnade lay the library which even after the terrible fire was still rich with its seven thousand volumes, and preserved, together with other precious works, the first Greek translation of the Bible drawn up by the Septuagint. Not far from that spot, as though the more readily to receive from it their in-



Cleopatra at Alexandria.
(From the painting by *Alexandre Cabanel*.)

tellectual nourishment, were assembled the numerous buildings forming the *Serapeum*. The home of history, philosophy, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, and the guardian of the texts, this famous university, to which after two thousand years we owe our possession of what remains to us of Greek literature, was in very truth the light of the world. The instruction received there and the reputation of its learned professors, with their erudite methods, their scientific instruments and even the *papyrus* placed at the disposal of students, gave it so great a renown that from Rome, Athens, and even Asia, people repaired to its walls, and wealthy families from all lands, whenever they thought they had discovered some exceptional aptitude in any of their children, desired that they should bear the distinguished mark of being pupils at Alexandria.

The eyes of Cleopatra continued to wander over the long, broad rectilinear avenues where carriages, litters, and horsemen, were freely moving. Her gaze rested on the circus, theatre, and gymnasium before which was standing a crowd attracted by the notices; on the stadium with its track winding in curves like the Meander; on the hippodrome so vast that twenty thousand spectators could barely fill it; and especially on the numerous and superb temples rising up from among the houses which they dominated with their mysterious bulk; and for a long time she gazed on the *Soma*, the mausoleum where in a crystal sarcophagus reposed the repatriated body of her heroic ancestor.

The Queen with anxious pride thought of the value of all these buildings, all this wealth, and asked herself if they would be hers to-morrow? And away beyond the expanse of her vision her thoughts followed up the inventory of this magnificent heritage; she dwelt on that inexhaustible valley watered by the divine river, on the thirty thousand cities from North to South which reared their ramparts of centuries old: Bubaste, where reigned the goddess of love; Memphis, slumbering at

the foot of the Pyramids; Thebes, the Holy City; Hermonthis, named the glory of the Two Horizons; and Edfou, possessor of most ancient treasures. Further still her vision pierced the regions of the South, with their granite, spices, and fabulous vineyards whereof each bunch of grapes weighed so heavy that two men could scarcely bear it to the wine-press. Her thoughts went back to that happy isle where scented paths preserved the traces of those footsteps trodden with her lover, and with returning confidence she murmured: "No! Egypt! Beloved Egypt! Land of Osiris and Râ! Thou who dost fill the granaries of the world and dost reverently guard thy dead! Garden of palms and vines! River bank whither come the ibis to drink! Thou shalt not know servitude!"

She spoke truly; there was always cause for hope. Salvation was on the road. A decisive victory had just been won by the armies of Cæsar's party. Pirates fleeing from Naxos had brought the news. Brutus, and after him Cassius, had both been crushed on the plains of Philippi, and, falling upon the sword which their sacrilegious hands had had the wickedness to plunge into the heart of their benefactor, had now expiated justice.

Cleopatra took breath. Her life, which had been darkened since the fatal day, took on a little colour. Though still shrouded in mist the future did not present that opaque mass wherein nothing can be distinguished. A kind of harmony began to re-establish itself between herself and the past. Rome was emerging from the shadow and if freed from agitators might perhaps once more count on her alliance. Meanwhile, faithful to the tradition of her fathers who had spent fortunes on the amusement of the people, the Queen commanded lavish rejoicings, starting with religious ceremonies at which sacrifices were to be offered. Was it not fitting that she should begin by rendering thanks to the gods by whom the crime had just been punished?

Every occasion for merrymaking was good to the

Alexandrines. If their city shed forth light by its learning, its *savants*, and the fame of their discoveries, it was also the abode of wild revelry, the spot where it was most pleasing and most enjoyable to live. Its immense and ever-increasing fortunes had developed luxury to an unimaginable degree. For pleasure of every kind, entertainment, dancing, racing, theatres, and orgies of wine and love, it had no equal.

The reputation of these Alexandrine festivities was widespread. The moment they were announced bands of revellers from Bubaste and Pelusium, even from the shores of Syria and Sicily, came to mingle with the population. On the large public ways of the new quarter, and in the tortuous alleys of Rakotis (the old portion), a noisy crowd began to swarm from early dawn. One had only to look at their variegated garb, their faces of all shades of colour—dark, fair, olive, yellow—to feel oneself in the midst of a cosmopolitan hurly-burly. With the animation of its two ports gorged with all that was most beautiful and rich from the columns of Hercules to the mouth of the Indus ; with its shows, its museums, its fabled Nile furrowed by day and night by boats decked with flowers ; with its primitive revelries which Hellenic culture had refined—this marvellous metropolis attracted the curiosity of all. Side by side with the high-shouldered native with his loins swathed in a loin-cloth of vivid stripes and urging on a donkey laden with skin water-bottles, or driving a cart stacked with wheat, might be seen the tanned, sun-scorched sailor dragging his ropes after him, or the soldier whose fine bearing made the passers-by turn round. Specimens of every race might be encountered, especially Greeks wearing their *pallium*, and easily recognised by their athletic suppleness ; Romans of bronze-coloured mien ; and Gauls whose blue eyes and woollen tunics drawn in at the waist offered a contrast to the heavy-eyed Asiatics with their painted robes trailing in the dust.

Even more easily discernible than the men were the

women whose place of origin could be recognised by the individuality of their head-dress, some letting their hair hang loosely, others rolling it up in spirals on either side of the cheek, and some decorating it with golden pins, flowers, and leaves, like the girls of Ephesus. A large number of nomads, banished as a rule to the outskirts of the city, added themselves to the throng, for the police had received orders to be tolerant that day. Except on the Via Regis, exclusively reserved for the retinues of officials, free circulation was permitted to Arabs who, leading one or more camels by a cord with a ring passed through their nose, dominated the crowd with a dignified air; to Jews concealing bags of money under their black, frayed *caftans*; to Ethiopians and Kaffirs on whose frizzy heads were balanced, without ever losing their equilibrium, baskets piled up with figs and cedrates. In the crowd you might also come across young girls going about in pairs to enjoy the public holiday and stopping to listen to old wives' tales of fortune-tellers, or to look at acrobats with their feet in the air swallowing blades of daggers, or at nimble and active jugglers writhing in the midst of flames which they made to play around them; sightseers roving this way and that way, children in danger of being trodden underfoot, and even great ladies, amused by these street sights, who would alight from their litters, making their servants follow carefully behind to avoid being jostled.

Nevertheless everybody was *most* terribly jostled, if we can believe the picturesque account left to us by Theocritus of one of these public holidays in which he puts two young Syracusan women on his stage.

Gorgo goes to look for her friend. She arrives breathless:

"Praxinoa! Quick, a chair! And put a cushion on it. How my heart is beating! I feared I should never see thee again. Thou livest so far off, and what a crowd to pass through!"

Praxinoa listens while she is attending to her *toilette*.

Water, soap, and the key of the large chest are brought to her by the servant Eunoe. She takes out a robe and a hat and dresses herself coquettishly.

Gorgo : "How well that robe with the long folds becomes thee! Did it cost thee very dear?"

Praxinoa : "Ah! Remind me not of it! More than two *mina* of pure silver without counting the time spent in sewing it together."

After some complaints about their husbands, and injunctions to a Phrygian woman to look after the child in their absence and to shut up the dog, the young women set out. As soon as they get outside the house *Praxinoa* cries : "What a throng, ye gods! What is to become of us! How shall we get through it? See, now there are soldiers and men on horseback! And I who fear nothing so much as horses! *Gorgo*! Look at that chestnut rearing!"

Gorgo : "Be not uneasy! There, he hath gone back to his place."

And they continue their way through the huge gathering. But the nervous *Praxinoa* is quite flurried.

"Give me thy hand," she said to *Gorgo*. "And do thou, Eunoe, take that of *Eutyichis*. Let us keep well together lest we lose each other."

In spite of these precautions the crowd soon separates them.

"Unfortunate that I am!" cries *Praxinoa*.

To crown her misfortunes her dress, her pretty pleated dress, is trodden upon by a passer-by.

She calls out to him excitedly :

"By Zeus! Look where thou goest if thou dost not desire that. . . ."

But the passer-by was a good fellow. Instead of getting angry he apologises, and then assists her out of the press of people.

"Take courage, woman! Now thou art out of danger."

Praxinoa offers her thanks with all the gratitude of one who has not quite recovered from her fear :

"Compassionate stranger, mayst thou be rewarded for all the kindly attentions thou hast rendered unto me, and mayst thou be protected from all harm."

Having again found each other the two friends fall into each other's arms.

"How I have searched for thee, Gorgo!"

"And I too, Praxinoa."

They then relate their misadventures:

Praxinoa: "Look, my robe is all torn!"

Gorgo: "And my cloak too! What will my husband say?"

And linking their arms they follow the road to Bruchium where the banquets are being made ready.

"Is it much further?" they ask an old woman they meet.

"Alas! That it is, my children."

"Can we easily reach there?"

The old woman who had read Homer makes a playful reply:

"After many efforts the Greeks entered Troy. If ye but take the trouble, my pretty things, ye may perhaps reach your destination."

On a sudden a fanfare of trumpets rang forth! It was the signal for the processions. Solemn, unending, they came forward heralded by musicians—half-naked players of cymbals clashing together discs gleaming like the sun, others carrying *sistra* and with a jerking movement rattling rings strung on threads of metals, and others with tambourines and drums covered with the skin of a wild ass, which they hung round their necks and struck with sycamore wands.

After an interval, to mark well the distance separating them from all that was merely human, the procession of priests came into view. Heralded by a single blast of cornets to guard the sanctity of the temple silence was already beginning to fall; then, in the midst of that respectful veneration which increased as the ranks of the hierarchy succeeded one another, came the readers of

horoscopes whose duty it was to interpret the omens ; hierogrammatists, learned readers of hieroglyphs ; bearded soothsayers burning grains of incense in small brass cups ; and *pastophori* whose privilege it was to expose the divine effigies to the ecstatic gaze of the faithful. Holding aloft gilded staves some balanced in the air the canvas on which these were depicted, others followed in chariots, and amid that universal fervour there passed by before the wide-opened and fixed gaze of the multitude the mysterious representations of Apis, Hathor, the Sacred Cow, Thothis of grimacing visage ; Horus with his head of a sparrow-hawk ; and Anubis the Guardian of the Dead symbolising the unknown powers. As they passed long shrieks and cries arose, for all believed in their hidden powers and fell to supplication with frenzied vigour.

Then between two rows of soldiers the High Priest advanced. He was very old and leaned upon a staff. A long veil of the colour of hyacinth covered his face and hands, for no profane look was permitted to gaze upon him. He alone might hold intercourse with the god who would presently through him make known the oracle. After him came the priestesses, young and pure, clad entirely in white, and holding a sprig of lotus in their tapering fingers. Then followed the diviners waving torches ; the bell-ringers ; the keepers of the birds bearing sacred chickens on rods covered with glue ; beggars displaying their infirmities ; vendors of pious images, scarabs, and amulets ; and the inevitable crowd of traffickers of sacred emblems ever dear to mankind. And all these incongruous elements, this seething medley of different races, passions and ideas, were moving forward on a settled plan, the feet of all were bent towards the object which held them spell-bound—the Temple of Serapis—rising on an eminence, resplendent and holy in the blue sky, attracting the gaze of all.

Built after the plan of ancient theocratic foundations this sanctuary, blending together every religion, was the

most renowned in all Egypt. The considerable sums set aside for its endowment were used in perpetually increasing its size and importance, and its huge mass, compared with other most celebrated monuments, was only surpassed by the Capitol in Rome. It was approached by one hundred steps. Its entrance, guarded by a row of Sphinxes, was of imposing proportions, and along its sides were *pylons*, painted yellow and vermillion, displaying streamers floating lightly in the air.

As each of the different colleges accomplished the ascent they ranged themselves along the porticoes. Some occupied the empty spaces between the columns, and gradually the structure filled with people, becoming a mass of human forms who by their impassivity presented the appearance of a group of statues.

All of a sudden a tremor went round. The looks of all were directed to a gleaming point at the top of the steps. "The Queen!" the voice of a herald announced. And there, surrounded by a gleaming guard was Cleopatra, seated high on a huge shield as though about to migrate to heaven. Looking upon her thus, sheathed in silver closely fitting round her statuesque form, her knees joined together, her elbows pressed to her body and her gaze turned to things super-terrestrial people no longer thought of what history related of her. She was no more a woman, but the august daughter of kings, the High Priestess who the next moment would penetrate within the secret places of the god. Above her head four fan-bearers waved gigantic fans of peacock's feathers, and at her feet, just like a long embroidered cushion, lay a panther at full length.

While the *microdouchi* were cutting the throats of the victims and laying their entrails, still warm, on the little mound in front of the temple doors, a young *aoidos* with his cithara resting on his shoulder, after making three genuflections began to chant the praises of the Queen: "Thy hair is a fragrant plant. Thy hands bear love in their palms. Thy forehead is like to the moon when it

cometh forth from the night. Thy large eyes with their glistening eyelashes are like unto two swallows in summer. Thy teeth gleam white like a rivulet flowing between banks flowering in roses and peonies." And after each *strophe* a choir of virgins chanted the refrain: "Hail to thee, most resplendent! Beloved daughter of Amun Ra!"

The moment for the holocausts had arrived. Standing up, her shoulders weighted with the mantle sacred to Isis, of the colour of wheat, and followed by priests and high dignitaries, Cleopatra crossed the threshold of the Temple, and the immense doors, over which kept guard the granite Cerberus, awe-inspiring to the imagination with its three heads—a wolf, a jackal and a lion, now closed behind them. In the innermost part, behind enormous columns covered with hieroglyphics setting forth the destinies of the human soul, a figure in marble and gold was seated. The Supreme Principle in which were blended the Chronos of earliest days, the Zeus of the Greeks, and the Jupiter of the Latins, Serapis was the embodiment of the god of the nation. All power was attributed to him. It was to him that the Egyptians looked for glory, health, riches, and the rising of the Nile which was the subject of their most ardent supplications. Its stature was three times that of a man, and a serene majesty was writ on its features. Smooth and flowing its beard spread out to its knees. The royal *Pschent* covered its brow, and its outspread arms and wide-opened hands reached out so as to touch the richly-encrusted walls of the shrine in a gesture which seemed to embrace the universe. By a carefully calculated effect the light coming from above fell upon its enamelled lips and from this single ray, from this mysterious kiss from heaven, arose the illusion of speech.

The table of sacrifice was drawn up before the colossal image. Around its broad circumference were engraved the signs of the zodiac. Burning oil sparkled in its centre, and wine, wheat in costly vessels, water drawn from the Nile, and the seven perfumes dear to the god,

lay side by side with the blood of victims. While the High Priest, bending towards the flames, poured forth the offerings which the fire devoured, the Queen lay prostrate. With flattering words she uttered her supplication : " O beauteous God ! God all powerful whom the elements obey, look with favour on my prayer ! Let loose the waters now standing still. May their abundance overflow their banks and give unto Egypt of their richness. Permit not that sedition bring trouble to their cities, nor enemies from without to come and lay waste their flocks. May a strong race come into our alliance and bring to us the help of foot-soldiers armed with arrows, and horsemen gleaming in brass ! "

Held in suspense by the mysterious and solemn rites passing above, all hearts were beating. They knew that this was the moment when the auguries would take shape and, as if they had but one soul and one voice, the multitude united themselves to the prayers of their representatives. Moved by invincible faith they repeated the words of supplication : " O beauteous God. God all powerful whom the elements obey, let loose the waters now standing still."

The smoke had cleared away when the cedar doors reopened and the Queen reappeared. She was very pale. Under the sparkling chains about her neck they saw her bosom heaving. Her straining eyes were looking out afar, beyond things of earth, to that region of prophetic mystery whither she had just penetrated. What had she seen ? What had she heard ? What oracle had the High Priest brought back to her from his audience with the god ? Three trumpet blasts announced that she was about to speak. She advanced to the edge of the first step and in her clear voice, like some melody from a flute, gave forth these words : " Praised be the name of Serapis ! His clemency is towards us. He promiseth to Egypt both glory and prosperity. After ye have sown, the Nile will extend its beneficent waters and the ears of wheat shall become swollen."

A huge shout went up. The sound from those thousands of chests was like a hurricane that had all of a sudden begun to blow. With fanaticism and frenzied gratitude every mouth cried aloud as if even now the portent had begun to take effect and the promised blessings to pour forth.

With a gesture like to that of Poseidon when he wills that the waves become quiet, the Queen demanded silence. She had not finished what she had to say. "The goodness of Serapis surpasseth our expectations. He loveth Egypt. He desireth her renown and greatness. At his bidding a warrior shall come whose sword knoweth not defeat."

A fresh burst of enthusiasm sprang forth which nothing this time could check. There was universal delirium, a looking forward to happiness, to that great unknown blessing which nations and individuals alike expect for the morrow.

The great shield drew near. The Queen ascended lightly the block of three ivory steps; then between the fans gently inclined over her head and the sleeping panther brushed by her small feet she took the road to the palace. Shouts, palms, and flowers accompanied her passing, but she appeared to see nothing. Lost in an inner world she was pondering. Little credulous as was her mind she had been impressed by the words pronounced by the High Priest. A warrior would really come! And still more anxiously she sought an answer as to who he should be. A name suggested itself to her mind. With strange insistence images of the past came back to her memory. Details which had been almost forgotten began to haunt her. It was one evening nearly three years ago, at the palace on the banks of the Tiber; the conversation between Cæsar and Trebonius had been dull; they were discussing the question as to whether the *Comitia* would meet or whether they should dispense with their assistance. All of a sudden the door had opened and Mark Antony

appeared ! It was life itself that entered ! He laughed ; his curly hair fell in abundant locks over his forehead ; his shoulders, fashioned to the stature of his ancestor Hercules, looked strong enough to bear off the Nemean lion. In his presence the atmosphere became impregnated with youth, with warm and happy exuberance, and all at once Cleopatra caught that look of desire which women are always quick to perceive. And how many times since that first evening had she not surprised that same look, that touching avowal from a man already consumed by a fire ! On another evening when for a moment they had been left alone, had she not felt the young man imprint his warm lips on her shoulder ? Her surprise and confusion were such that in order to hide her feelings she was obliged to take instant flight from the room.

Since then he had shown more restraint, but though he said nothing, though he exhibited before her a reserve to which his temperament was little accustomed, it was because his friendship for Cæsar placed a seal upon his lips. How could he have dared ? And she herself ! Although far from insensible to his feelings, which she guessed, how could she permit him to declare them ? Beyond any doubt the supreme rank occupied by Cæsar at that time placed Antony in the background and barred any advances by his lieutenant, who owed him everything and had everything to expect from him. Besides, however tempting the manly beauty of Antony might have been, Cleopatra had no other desire than for glory. She would not have given up that for any other joy. But death had now completely changed everything. The lieutenant had become the Emperor and had no other master with whom to reckon. " O God ! If he should be the deliverer thou hast promised ! "

At this thought a flood of hope swelled her heart grown weary of widowhood. She hastened to be alone to abandon herself to the limitless course of her dreams.

The sun had just set and a pure crescent was rising in the opposite part of the sky. Cressets, planted like trees along the avenues, were being lighted. In narrow rose-coloured lines along the sides of the houses countless numbers of little lamps, suspended like fruit from the white branches of the plane trees, were beginning to gleam. If the day's festivities had been imposing and of a noble character, the evening's rejoicings were to satisfy baser appetites. The Queen had given instructions that no expense should be spared to put joy into the heart of man. At the gates of the palace fountains poured forth copious supplies of wine and in the inner court, on long tables reaching from the entrance to the kitchens as far as the stables, cooked meats, pastries, and cheese were offered to the public. Well-regulated measures were taken, accompanied if necessary by blows from staves, to prevent any scrambling and jostling, and everyone was compelled to go away after he had received his portion. Many then made their way to the theatres where performances were given gratuitously; others preferred to stay outside around the booths where buffoons made the air resound with their coarse farce, or to finish the evening amid the scenes of orgy to which the low haunts of Rakotis were largely given over.

While the lower classes, crowded one against the other in an atmosphere of perspiration and dust, were amusing themselves in this manner, the higher orders, who made holiday everyday, held their rejoicings in more refined surroundings. Leaving behind them the crowded districts towards the hour of dinner they made their way down the aristocratic avenues slumbering in the midst of their quiet gardens situated to the west of the capital.

A group of men, elegantly dressed and perfumed, stopped before a small but charmingly-proportioned house surrounded by turpentine trees. A slave came to open the door. After crossing the vestibule where a fountain was playing, they were conducted into a room hung from top to bottom with thousands of *papyri*

rolled upon rods. It was the library in which Polydemus, grown rich by the sale of perfumes, delighted to receive his friends. Those he had invited that evening belonged to the most diverse sets, for he had a liking for every kind of conversation, and wished that opinions on questions of the day should be freely expressed in his own house. With the exception of art, in which he held an exclusive taste for Greek beauty, his own opinions were too indifferent for him to be able to flatter himself that those of others could ever annoy him. He therefore risked inviting Apollodorus, the Queen's secretary, whose devotion to her was known to everyone, to meet Demetrius, the lieutenant who had fought against her under Achilles; Sati, a Theban of ancient lineage, who in his attachment to old traditions discountenanced all foreign influence; rhetoricians imbued with the culture of Athens; financiers, artists, and even philosophers as far apart from each other as were the politicians.

The drawing of a curtain disclosed to view the brilliantly-lighted banqueting hall. On bronze pedestals between slender columns were placed busts of Homer, Pindar, Zeno and Epicurus, and, alternating with them, as though in gratitude to those great men for their indulgence, were placed graceful statues of women.

The guests took their places on the couches arranged around the table covered with silver plate and vessels of painted clay. In the centre was an alabaster bowl containing clusters of roses, some of which, as though too heavy, trailed down in garlands over the white linen tablecloth. As soon as each guest was comfortably resting on his elbow the first dishes were handed round—eels from Lake Mareotis soused in cummin sauce, lampreys swimming in fat, and roes served in little *casseroles*. Conversation meanwhile began with the ordinary small talk on events of the day. One praised the processions which had never been better regulated; another the lavish banquets served in the courts at Bruchium, or the shows in the circus in which two

hundred beasts and twenty gladiators had been killed ; others the illuminations which, by turning round to the windows, they could see making a red glare in the sky.

These praises gave Apollodorus an opportunity of making much of the generosity of the Queen, who was ever anxious to give happiness to her people.

" All health to Cleopatra," replied the artists who were lodged by her in the apartments at the Paneum.

" All hail, the well beloved of the gods ! "

" Honour and glory to her ! " " The joy of our eyes ! " " The enlightenment of our minds ! "

But as usually happens, these laudatory expressions gave rise to comments of another kind. If the Queen had passionate admirers, especially among the young impressed by her beauty and her intellect, the more serious-minded feared her audaciousness. Since her *liaison* with Cæsar they had upbraided the freedom of her morals, and after the recent death of her young brother the more hostile had even insinuated : " What had she done with her brother ? "

This evening when talking of the fêtes and the lavish expenditure of which some had been boasting, others from couch to couch were exchanging unfriendly remarks. At a time of famine, such as they were now passing through, could not a better use for the money have been found ? Others, aware of certain habits, certain tastes, and features of her way of living and her dress (which Cleopatra since her return from Italy had no scruples in exhibiting) criticised her severely. On that very day had she not disdained the old ceremonial use by substituting a diadem for the *Pschent* surmounted by the sacred *Ureus*—the ancient tiara with which the kings and queens had never failed to cover their hair when appearing on public occasions ? Beneath this head-dress, elegantly framing her forehead and temples, the champions of Egyptian tradition had been horrified to recognise, in place of the figure of Isis whose image his

priestess should faithfully have reflected, that of a Minerva of some kind.

Sati was not slow in deploring this. "It is the first time that one of our sovereigns hath departed from our immemorial custom."

And when Nicias, the sculptor, remarked that the diadem by leaving free the neck was deliciously becoming to Cleopatra's fine profile, the old Theban rebuked him. "Far from encouraging, should she not be the first to discountenance, foreign methods?"

This uncompromising attitude was hardly to be wondered at on the part of a man who still wore the old national tunic, held in by a girdle with floating ends, and whose curled beard came down upon his breast. But Apollodorus laughingly remarked that this was showing himself very severe on a question of head-dress.

Unfortunately the matter was not so frivolous as the devoted secretary would have people believe. This he knew better than anyone. From attacks like these how could he not recognise the state of mind of men like Sati who, in a greater or lesser degree resenting the intervention of Rome, reproached the Queen with having provoked it, and of having given evidence in a thousand details that she remained faithful to this intervention.

The former lieutenant of Achilles cruelly chose this moment to remind them of all that this intervention had cost Egypt—two years of war, the destruction of their fleet, and a large portion of their library given over to the flames. . . .

The recollection of this disaster in particular rendered their minds pensive, for every one of them loved books, and deplored that so many treasures had been lost. Was the dinner-party going to be spoiled?

As if he felt the prick of a spur Polydemus saw the necessity of introducing a diversion. Pointing to the shelves of citron wood between which were pressed close against each other ten thousand rolls of *papyrus*, he

announced that by his will he had left them to the city, and that several among them of which he was the only man to possess a copy would take the place of those so unfortunately destroyed.

This generous act was highly appreciated. The friends of the good citizen warmly congratulated him and unanimously expressed the hope that the legacy of which they had just been informed would only be realised on a far-distant date.

The second course was beginning. On an enormous hollow metal dish they were bringing in a sheep skewered together and frizzling, then on a tray surrounded with a thousand different ingredients came a huge goose trussed with its feathers on and stuffed with snipe. In the twinkling of an eye these dishes were carved and handed round, beginning with those guests nearest to the master of the house. They used silver *spatulæ* for eating these dishes and scooped up the sauce in the hollow of the plates with spoons the handles of which were chased. The reflection from the lamps gilded the tablecloth, and the scent of the roses was so strong that it seemed to season the viands with which it mingled. Thus employed, the munching of their jaws allowed a few moments of silence during which was heard the quick step of slaves coming and going on the carpet.

Suddenly from one of them the news spread round that a galley bearing important despatches had just entered the port. Nothing was yet known of what the despatches contained and nothing definite could be learned until the morrow, but the rumour had gone abroad that grave events had happened in Rome. There was a quiver of excitement. As though they already felt the meshes of the net which was one day to fall and hold them captive, the Egyptians were alarmed at any news from that quarter. What were they going to hear, what fresh horrors, what scandals, since for the last two years the Forum had been but a haunt of money-changers, a den of thieves, and how many times had they not

heard the echo of the terrible scenes which were being enacted there ?

Desirous that the harmony of his table should not a second time be disturbed, Polydemus expressed the hope that with the triumph of Cæsar's party a reign of order would be established. Whereupon nearly everyone exclaimed, "What order or justice could be expected from men who in defence of the same cause had not ceased to rend each other ?"

They did not mention Lepidus ; his mediocrity saved him from being discussed. But Antony ? Octavius ? Which of the two was covered with the greater ignominy ? Each of them master in turn, the only point of agreement between them had been the interchange of lists bearing the names of those who were to be proscribed. Under their joint Consulate the enormity of their exactions and murders had surpassed anything that had been seen under Sulla. And amid a hubbub of talk everyone began to tell horrible stories of events which had come to their direct knowledge, or had been confided to them in letters :

"A Prætor, while in the exercise of his duties, on learning that he had just been proscribed tried to escape," related Eudoxos. "He was too late ! Before he had time to get past the entrance of the Tribunal a centurion had run him through."

"Mothers, from fear of being compromised, had shut the door upon their own sons who were under suspicion, and daughters had disclosed the hiding-places of their fathers," related Lycon.

"Even children were not safe," related another. "When going to school one of them had been seized by an executioner and put to death under the eyes of the parents."

"But the assassination of Cicero was the worst of all," cried the rhetorician Antippos who had travelled to Rome on purpose to hear the voice of the great orator.

"An abominable crime by which the name of Mark

Antony will be for ever stained," agreed one of his colleagues.

But Apollodorus, who had reason to be thankful to him when he was arranging the escape of the Queen, tried to bring upon Octavius all the odium attaching to this murder. It was he, the friend of Cicero, who handed him over, that cold and cowardly man, with no personal grievance—the man whom only a few days before Cicero had pressed to his heart calling him "My son."

The faces of all around showed an expression of horror such as the sight of a serpent near to one calls up. Then they fell to talking of Mark Antony. In spite of his crimes he at least had something amusing about him—a man who wore his huge helmet to go and drink with soldiers and girls, his great sword hanging by a leather strap to his shoulder, and his chariot drawn by lions in which he drove with Cytheris the courtesan. One voice even was lifted up in his favour, for brave men always find someone to defend them. Lycon the philosopher, who professed to despise life, recalled how, in face of the conspirators with daggers still in hand, when Octavius had hidden himself and terror was general, Antony had had the courage to demand for Cæsar an imposing funeral and to deliver in celebration of his virtues a panegyric over the body of his benefactor.

But this warm tribute found few supporters. The group of distinguished men of letters who heard him found nothing to interest them in a man they considered a mere country-bumpkin, whose valour was shown only on the battlefield.

Nicias the sculptor then launched a diatribe against the Romans which was more in keeping with the general sentiments. "If the encroachments of these barbarians were to go on what would remain of civilisation? Already—he knew what he was talking about having come from Corinth—many beautiful buildings had perished. Greece was a heap of ruins. How many others would they have to deplore?"

The dinner was nearing its close. Pastries and creams were giving forth their scent of honey. The tartness of the lemons was all the more delectable inasmuch as the repast had been much spiced. From the beginning the drinks had flowed in increasing richness as they approached the dessert. After cider and hydromel they had tasted the wines of Phœnicia, with their delicate flavour of violets, then the warm vintages of Spain. They were now on the famous light sparkling wines of Gaul which chased away gloomy thoughts.

The talk now ran on women. Their absence, an unusual thing with Polydemus, was due to the fact that those whom he had invited that evening—courtesans for the most part, for he was a bachelor—had been in request from many quarters. Some young men addicted to the racecourse had drawn Faustina and Lea to the Stadium to see their horses run. Chloris was inseparable from Naudreas the actor on those evenings when, shod in the *cothurnus*, with his speaking trumpet at his lips, he declaimed the rôle of Orestes which brought him many a fine fortune. An entertainment at the house of Gathenus had claimed Moussaria and Trophena, for it was known that the two sons of Rupinus the banker, and the son of the richest shipowner of Ephesus, were to be there, and lastly, a great number had preferred to be free that evening with a view to strolling late about the Heptastadium where they could not fail on an evening like this to chance on advantageous meetings.

The more elderly agreed that for an enjoyable dinner they could do very well without women.

Sati expressed the opinion that their presence, more often than not, was a hindrance to conversation. "Is that because they are bashful?" asked Lycias who liked his little joke.

"They can only talk about love," sighed the financier in a tired voice.

The poet Melanis, who up till then had kept silence, protested. "During those hours which are not devoted

exclusively to love must we deprive ourselves of the pleasure of evoking their charming memory ? ”

“ I think,” declared the lieutenant, “ that love deriveth no profit by being put into words.”

At this moment the cup-bearers, with extreme caution, brought in an *amphora*. It contained a wonderful wine from Cyprus, one of those vintages dear to connoisseurs whose lips only approached it with respect. Many declared that nothing so rich had ever caressed their throats before !

“ O liquor ! O golden stream, mirror of the sun ! O beaker which the goodness of the gods hath extended to earth to gladden the hearts of men ! ” cried the youthful Melanis in a vein of rhapsody.

Taking advantage of the good humour spread around the table by this wine Apollodorus reminded them that if Cyprus had again become an Egyptian province, if the produce of its vines now entered Alexandria free of duty, it was to Cleopatra that this was due.

“ Quite true,” agreed Polydemus. “ The restoration of the isle by Cæsar was in guerdon of the happy event that had befallen the Queen.”

The tasteful reality made them forget their grievances. Even those who had just before criticised her most keenly now lifted their glasses in honour of Cleopatra, and the master of the house had the pleasure of seeing the banquet ending harmoniously instead of foundering in the surge of disputes.

Towards eleven o'clock, after the servants had retired dancing girls waiting with musicians under the *peristyle*, now came in. These were twelve young girls, of the purest blood of the Nile, a type still in existence but known in our time as gypsies. Their supple bodies soon put themselves in movement to the playing of the five-stringed lyre. The first group, advancing, retiring, and then taking each other's hands, performed less a dance than a play of turns and graces, similar to nymphs with satyrs pursuing them. But this first exhibit soon gave

place to more lively frolics. Tambourines and castanets resounded. It was as if their limbs, up till then only gracefully curving and bending, had now received an irresistible impulse. While from beneath their eyelids, stained dark blue, their black eyes flashed, a whole cadence of cries struck the air as their heels, clashing bangles against each other, stamped on the ground. A whirlwind of nude flesh mingled with their fluttering draperies; their curving waists straightened out, and their arms, bent like branches, interlaced and then sharply disengaged themselves.

Now soft and enticing, now obeying the impulses of the frenzied music, the dancers continued in this manner far into the night. The more elderly guests, rendered heavy by the long banquet and abundant libations, soon fell into drowsy indifference, but the younger men, whose attention had languished during the dinner, became feverishly excited. Riveting their gaze upon the graceful movements of the dancers they became intoxicated as, with an effable ritual, love was parodied before their eyes, representing it swaying, growing, then all of a sudden masterful in a triumphant embrace.

The roses were dead in their alabaster vases; the torches, one by one, were going out in the hollow of their sconces, and dawn was stealing pale through the openings between the curtains. After thanking their amiable and tactful host for their excellent entertainment, the guests took their leave.

Apollodorus, whose duties called him early to Bruchium, decided that he had not time to return home, for his house lay some way off on the road to Sais. But he had at least leisure for a stroll. A little walking would also serve to dissipate the last fumes of Cyprian wine.

The town was now deserted. Silence, but just fallen, now began to reign and the marble flag-stones of the pavement were still vibrating with the footsteps which had been pressed upon them by the multitude. Here and there garlands trailed on the ground side by

side with objects that had been dropped—torn articles of clothing and other *débris* of apparel that had been smart on the evening before. How could he prevent himself feeling a certain depression on seeing these spots abandoned, these objects perished? The rhetorician pondered sadly over what had been said at the house of Polydemus. Ah! How unruly, turbulent and hard to govern were the subjects of Cleopatra! What hostility there was against her, what rancour ready to unite and repeat one of those revolutions under which her fathers had been ceaselessly borne down! And from how many secret plots already had she too not had to extricate herself! And he remembered the day when he had gone to seek her on the sands of Canopus in a fisherman's boat. But at that time powerful protection was waiting to exert itself on her behalf. To-day, alone, criticised, gainsaid, would she be equal to her task?

Buried in these thoughts Apollodorus reached the gates of the palace. In the hazy morning light the unsubstantial architecture with its numerous columns seemed to be almost a thing of air. And what was his surprise at recognising the Queen on one of the terraces! Her hair was unloosed and her scarf floated in the sea breeze. Having previously obtained information he was aware that when her ladies-in-waiting were about to put her to bed on the evening before a courier had arrived with whom she had had a lengthy interview. As a consequence of this she had shown extreme joy. "There are moments when life is too beautiful to give up any part of it to sleep," she had answered her attendants who pressed her to take a little rest. And staying up alone she had unrolled the parchments which confirmed all that she had been told. The events were so many and so unexpected that she had to read the details two or three times over. And so it was really true!

Brought together at last by their victory the avengers of Cæsar had set up a fresh Triumvirate. The empire of the world was theirs. They had divided it, or rather

Mark Antony had carved it up in his own manner while Octavius lay ill, terrified in his tent, his teeth chattering at having done battle, although he had won ! Abandoning to his sorry collaborator the government of barbarian Gaul and a portion of Italy ruined and still seething with revolutionary rumours ; and to Lepidus, who had not even taken part in the war, Spain which was always in rebellion, and the African provinces ; he, the supreme arbiter and the adored leader of thirty-two legions had taken as his portion the East—the lion's share which he had always aimed at and coveted because of the riches which lay there.

So not in vain were the words uttered by the god ! The promise was obtaining full realisation ! Cleopatra would have an ally as powerful as Cæsar. The very one moreover for whom she had yearned ! She knew what a woman like herself could do with a man, and a great man too—the past had taught her this. Had not the right moment now come to begin the experience over again, to tempt that fortune which had betrayed her the first time ? A flood of hope surged up within her. At the bottom of her heart it was as though a magic stream had at one stroke borne away all sadness. The future took shape and filled her with fair prospects. She opened her eyes and looked before her. Feeling herself shut in between the walls of her room she gained the terrace. The night was ending. A veil seemed to be trembling between the sky and the sea. A sudden gleam shot through and all the horizon became rose-coloured. Through a shimmering opening the dawn came forth golden and crimson.

CHAPTER III

MARK ANTONY

As portrayed by flatterers of Augustus, Antony is depicted as a man made up of all the vices. Certainly his adversaries were right to denounce a figure the scandal of whom went far and wide, whose excesses of passion in the end drew him on to the crime of fighting against his own country. It is intelligible that moderate-minded and good men should have reproached him with the freedom of his morality, his resounding boastfulness, the bumpers tossed off on every occasion and without measure, the frenzied prodigality of his expenditure, his gold plate, his mistresses, his play-actors and buffoons accompanying him to the camps where he commanded, the lions harnessed to his chariot—in a word, all those eccentricities which caused him to be described as “a colossal child who might have conquered the world but could never resist a pleasure.”

But side by side with all this, how many attractive qualities have been passed over in silence! If he had not possessed them as a groundwork visible through his deceptive motley, how explain that constant and irresistible attraction exercised by that joyous being upon all who came near him? We know that sympathy goes out to people less by reason of the virtues they practise with an effort than by those which have cost them nothing and are inborn. What conclusion then can we draw but that

Antony was gifted with a most engaging manner? Of superb build and looks, with the airs of a great nobleman, ardent, of a gaiety that was infectious, sometimes coarse but never spiteful, he possessed all those gifts which render life and all its surroundings agreeable. His liberality was far famed and his friends knew they might have recourse to it. One of them, Curio by name, also a fast liver like Antony, finding himself in dire straits sought him one morning when he was just going to dress. Antony had also gambled away his last *sesterce* the very night before. The two friends were in consternation. They were on a campaign far from Rome and the situation was urgent. What was to be done? How to find the money required? Antony cast his eyes around him. Equipment, arms, skins of wild beasts—nothing that had any monetary value. Suddenly he bethought him of the basin in which water for his toilet had already been prepared. With a quick gesture he turned it upside down.

"Here, take that," he said, "the brass founder will give thee a good two talents for it."

If he lavished money without thought it never occurred to him to procure it by base methods. Among all the infamies with which his mortal enemy, Cicero, charged him, he could not help rendering Antony this justice: "It is true that he cannot be accused of pecuniary malversations, self-interested views, or any villainy of that kind."

Spite his libertinism and his deplorable propensity to drunkenness, Antony did not lack nobility. Seneca, another enemy, recognised this: "*Magnum virum ingenii nobilis*" were the words he bestowed upon him. And what an excellent note in the character of a man, even in the quality of his mind, was his constant and ungrudging subordination to the greatness of another. So long as Cæsar was living his young brother-in-arms considered his place as second to him. For the idea to enter his mind to step into the first rank it required that his great

brother should no longer be there and that he should only have Octavius to match himself against.

But it was on the battlefield that his temperament displayed itself in its entirety. Patient, firm, imperturbable, a model of endurance and submission to discipline, Antony earned the admiration of all. The soldiers who saw him in moments of danger the first to hurl himself against the enemy and expose his own life with unmatched impetuosity would have followed him to the ends of the earth. They looked on him as a god. In an organisation such as his, wherein everything went beyond the usual limits, the reactions too had their full swing. The more hardships he underwent the greater frenzy he displayed in exacting full compensation. During the heroic retreat from Mutina he slept on the bare ground drinking stagnant water and eating wild roots; but what a revenge he took afterwards! The moment peace was made, good living claimed its rights, and those famous orgies which Silenus would not have disavowed, took place. Any other constitution than Antony's would have gone under with such a course of living. His was of prodigious strength. Just as moderation is generally the rule of other men he was only content with excess. After each fatigue borne with rugged endurance, after each pleasure enjoyed without stint, he rose up strengthened and renewed. One might have said that he thereby retempered his mettle.

None the less, generous as Nature had been to him, she had refused to this descendant of Jupiter and Semele the most essential gift, without which others are of little worth; right judgment was lacking. How was it possible for him to exercise this? His passions were of such impetuosity that he was drawn on before he had time to reflect. Irresistibly they seized hold of him and made him break loose after the manner of hurricanes which calm down only after they have laid waste everything in their path. Two contrary elements disputed possession of this turbulent and unstable soul—ambition

and pleasure. Each of them master in turn, they drove him to extremes. The one, all-powerful at the beginning of his career, had inspired those brilliant actions which had placed him in the forefront during the campaigns of Gaul and Cilicia, had made him formidable to the conspirators, and, between two other adventures, was to urge him on to the conquest of Persia in the track of Alexander. The other, however, was to carry him away. We shall watch this voluptuousness little by little taking complete possession of its fine prey, binding and monopolising his faculties, suffocating them one by one, and finally casting him down into the deepest abyss.

But at the time of which we are speaking, on the morrow of Philippi, before he had set foot on the soil of the East which was to be his triumph and his ruin, Antony possessed his full equilibrium. If his senses were bubbling over, his brain was none the less busily occupied over vast projects. In quitting the rugged country of Macedonia, which had only vouchsafed him victory at the price of most austere privations and was still enveloping him in the rigours of an icy winter, his thoughts turned to those fair lands bathed in sunshine, those regions of abundance and delight over which his valour had made him master and which were now awaiting him. By what route should he begin his inspection? Each road smiled and beckoned him, each shore promised some fresh enchantment. Over beyond Ossa and Pelion shutting him in with their snowy peaks, lay Attica, the home of refinement and learning; then near neighbour to her lay the coast of Asia swarming with wealthy cities each one surpassing the other—Smyrna, Ephesus and Pergamos; still further on was Syria with its palm trees, its gardens overflowing with luscious fruits, and Libanus on which debouched caravans coming from the furthest East laden with silks and precious stones; then Palestine, bare between its groves of olive trees but dominated and made resplendent by its holy city of Jerusalem, with its Temple, that place of everlasting

pilgrimage against which from the four horizons the ebb and flow of the Jewish race came and went ; then lastly there was Egypt, the land of violets and perfumes, the kingdom of Cleopatra.

Since the day when the disorder inaugurated by the Ides of March had separated them, Antony had never forgotten the beautiful queen. How many times in the midst of the horrors of revolution, or during long night-watches beneath his tent, had he not evoked her disturbing memory ! How many times had he not thought he had caught again that indefinable look with which, when sure of not being observed, Cæsar's mistress had responded to his own ! That glance which shot towards him, tender and velvety from between her long lashes, as though inviting him to love her, he still treasured with so lively a feeling that at times he seemed all of a tremble. How many stifled utterances during those evenings at the Transtevere surged up from the bottom of his heart ! With the persistence of unsatisfied desire he ceaselessly returned to the thought. Repeatedly he would say to himself that what the presence of Cæsar had made impossible no longer held anything to which he might not now aspire. Cleopatra was free, and had he not in his turn become one of the pillars of the world, one of those men upon whom every woman, were she even a queen, would be proud to lean ? Above all he possessed that magic gift of youth which permitted every hope, and with the most glorious and most enviable destiny before his eyes might well allow him to say to himself : " Why should this not be mine ? " A doubt however brooded in his mind. What impression had he produced upon Cleopatra ? Nothing in their relations had given him any hint. She had certainly been charming, but always circumspect, and careful not to awaken the jealousy of Cæsar. What sentiment had moved her that day when finding himself for a moment alone with her, he had ventured to kiss her soft bare shoulder, and she had turned away and left the *atrium* without a word, without offence,

without a smile, like some beautiful sphinx! Was it love for the great man which had made her so prudent, or had it been fear to compromise his powerful protection? No, never would he be able to unravel the complicated soul of this woman, nor to forget her feline grace, nor above all that glance, that deep look which left him troubled as a night in spring! What had she become like in these three years? What had passed in her mind? He knew nothing of her life, nor how she fared. Oh, if only he could see her again!

Antony however had not yet reached the point of allowing his amorous fancies to occupy the first place in his mind. The charges and duties he had assumed still governed his life. He felt the necessity of visiting the provinces which had fallen under his jurisdiction, of supervising and instituting reforms and doing all that they had a right to expect from him. What reason could he have to begin with Egypt? Properly speaking Egypt was not a Roman province, and could wait. Besides, the season was not favourable for making sea voyages. He therefore directed his steps towards Greece. It was not the first time he had approached that noble land. His feet had already trodden the plains of Thessaly when, as a young captain, he had fought against Pompey. Delphi, Corinth and Olympia had opened to him their temples, rich in sculpture, and wonderful with the goldsmith's art. He had been through the woods of Eleusis, and the theatre at Epidaurus had borne his mind into the realms of fate wrought by the art of Aeschylus. What joy to see again these celebrated spots, to come back to them with a resplendent title and illimitable power!

The Hellenes, who had had time to become accustomed to foreign domination, no longer hated their conquerors. They were even disposed to like this Roman who was said to be as beautiful as Alcibiades and to match Themistocles in military attainments. With a people who placed strength and beauty of body as the

foremost of the gifts the gods could grant to man, what personality could have a better chance of pleasing them than that of this son of Hercules? In the homely manner of their country they gave him a graceful welcome, and the burghs sent deputations to meet his litter bearing branches or torches according to the time of day. On his entering a town young girls cast flowers before him, and choirs of young men chanted songs and danced to the sound of lyres.

When petitions were presented most flattering eulogies were addressed to him. Wishing to prove himself worthy of the latter, he habitually exercised generosity in granting the former. Thus at Megara he awarded ten thousand talents for the rebuilding of the theatre; at Thebes and Larissa he had those houses restored which had been destroyed by fire by Pompey's levies; and at Corinth he re-established the cult of Venus Pandenos on the ruins of the old temple. But while scattering gold around he hastened his progress, for this honey-scented homage was delaying him and behind the slopes of Hymettus Athens was awaiting him.

Although grievously maltreated by the armies of Sulla, pillaged and impoverished by successive greedy administrators, with her incommodious and narrow streets, her insignificant houses and rambling public places, the city of Pericles still preserved her prestige. Had she possessed only her incomparable atmosphere and the brilliant effects which morning and evening the sun played on the rosy sides of Pentelicus, she would have deserved to be loved; but the home of Phidias was still adorned by nearly all his masterpieces. The monuments on the Acropolis were still intact; nothing had yet impaired the pure glory of the Parthenon; the Pœcile still preserved its brilliant decoration of many colours, fresh as on the first day, and the Propylæum opened to the blue sky its five symmetrical gates.

Little inclined towards the arts as Antony was by temperament and by his life as a soldier, he was not

however quite insensible to things of beauty. Rome, already beginning to fill with works of art, had taught him to discern them, and the Hellenic education which in common with every patrician he had received in his youth, had not left him ignorant of the epics of Homer of old, nor of the sublime pages in which Plato had taught mankind to catch a glimpse of divine wisdom. It was therefore with a mind penetrated with reverent respect that he crossed the bridge of Ilissus.

Athens was not only a venerated sanctuary, a relic of the ancient glory of four centuries back which had shed over the world renown such as never was to be seen again ; she had remained a centre that was still full of life. Less numerous and less richly endowed than those of Alexandria, her schools benefited by the reputation attaching to institutions of the past. Philosophers, poets, and artists, although only distantly recalling those of her great epoch, had not ceased to arise and to collect there. Around them and her fencing masters, her unrivalled instructors in horsemanship, her gymnasts skilful in throwing the javelin and the discus, a large proportion of her youth were being brought up to be faithful to the tradition of maintaining a sound mind in an agile and robust body. Nourished on a reverence for their republican past, which had formed the grandeur of their small country, these young men were ardent enthusiasts ; a generous impulse drew them to the side of noble causes, to all that reminded them of those heroes who had been of the same blood as themselves. On learning of the death of Cato, their *élite* had gone forth to offer their lives at Philippi, and at this stage Mark Antony, as compared with Octavius, represented in their eyes all the old liberal spirit remaining in Rome.

The Triumvir was at no pains to disappoint such a flattering popularity. Aware of the taste for military display possessed by these sons of Themistocles, he made his entry into their city on horseback, in helmet and cuirass, to the accompaniment of the clank of arms, and,

conforming to the simplicity of their civic customs, contented himself with the plain hospitality offered to him in the old palace of the Archons. Vessels of gold, silken robes and litters, were put aside ; he kept a frugal table, and mindful of the example of Cæsar ascended on foot the heights of the Acropolis, clad in a woollen cloak and preceded by only one lictor.

Nothing during the stay he made at Athens was to belie this first attitude. As if suddenly power had converted him, or as if he had felt the value of moderation while breathing the air of Attica, Antony astonished all who had previously known him. His conduct became that of a ruler, and the decrees he was called upon to issue bore the seal of sound judgment. Not content with merely edifying, the Athenian people soon saw that he was determined to please them. It was the month of the festivals held in honour of Adonis, and consenting to join in the celebrations he gracefully and simply associated himself in their rites consecrated by flowers quick to open their petals and quick to fade, thus symbolising the premature death of the son of Myrrha. It pleased him too to listen to the elegies recited by women in robes of mourning lamenting the young god, and to the hymns with which on the following day these same women, crowned with roses, filled the air in token of his resurrection. Surrounded by an Areopagus of notables on the Pnyx he accepted the presidency of many gatherings, distributing prizes to those who had distinguished themselves either in the races or in competitions for eloquence.

Had Antony really become virtuous ? Could such a transformation be sincere ? Could the former lover of Cytheris have no other desire than to win the hearts of the people ? Some of those who took an interest in his future greatness believed this and rejoiced. In reality the need of new sensations impelled him to seek them in ways most remote from his usual habits. Was he acting a part, or did he wish to mystify them ? Properly

speaking, no ; but the blood boiling in his veins was too active, too challenging, for him to be content with only one kind of existence. By making a change, by assuming different forms and appearances, by multiplying himself as it were, this prodigious lover of pleasure thought to give himself the illusion of tasting more of life.

His real nature however was not long in asserting itself. Quite suddenly he felt he had had enough of these simple pleasures, and irksome duties. The Asiatic coast was over yonder, close by, presenting to his eyes the contour of its pleasant countryside and its cities with their alluring luxury. Shaking off one morning his *cothurni* which had trodden the venerable dust of the Acropolis, he took ship and turned his prow towards Antioch.

Picturesque above all other cities, this metropolis, the third in greatness in the world, appeared from a distance to be suspended to the range of the Corypbean mountains. Some little way before entering the port of Seleucia voyagers contemplated with surprise the gigantic military constructions climbing up the rocky slopes, crowning the summit with their crenelated walls. The real city, white amid its cypresses, then came into outline pleasantly resting on the banks of the Orontes. To a theatre, gymnasium, aqueduct, circus and hippodrome—those charming adjuncts of great capitals—was added a *Corso*, a broad avenue, bordered with quadruple rows of columns which crossed the city from end to end. This luxurious promenade was a place of meeting where day and night a stream of elegant life flowed to and fro, and on certain days the animation surpassed that of the Roman Forum. Such varied attractions brought to Antioch, especially since the eclipse of Athens, a very dense population in addition to a large coming and going of foreigners—Persians, Jews and Levantines of every kind, without counting those women who came from Susa, Ecbatana, often even from the banks of the Ganges, with the express intention of becoming courtesans. Under the

influence of this strolling population and the great wealth which a volume of trade, equalled only by that of Alexandria, brought from all the counting-houses of the Mediterranean, their morals had little by little become depraved. From Paphlagonia to the Kingdom of Palmyra they were reputed to be the most scandalous in a region where morality was everywhere at a very low ebb. We may judge of this from the fact that on those days when they celebrated the festival of Maionna a swarm of young girls waving wreaths ran naked through the city, while others, likewise ungarbed, swam before the gaze of all in the limpid waters of the public baths.

This corrupt atmosphere acted upon Antony with astonishing rapidity. Immediately he breathed it his heart dilated ; he felt jovial, lively, and became possessed again of his formidable appetite for pleasure. Everything in the palace of the Seleucides, recalling the scenes that had made Sardanapalus celebrated, conspired to develop these feelings. When he lounged along the *Corso* thronged with beautiful and fascinating women, did not their smiles whisper : " Every hour filched away from pleasure is worth no more than those which shall succeed death ? " How far removed was he now from those austere assemblies on the Pnyx, from the palace of the Archons, from all that had for a time reformed him ! With a kind of mad vehemence which always seized hold of him at each of his transformations, he made short work of renouncing the Athenian simplicity he had adopted as a disguise, and returned to his natural tastes. To the grave bearing and administrative cares which had held him since his departure from Macedonia, succeeded a licence proportionate to the sustained efforts he had laid upon himself. Urged no longer by the fear of being thought ill of, everything around him being now in unison, his energies expanded. Jovial parasites soon invaded his privacy, drawing him into abuses in which he lost all dignity. Becoming heedless of the rank which raised him above his new companions, he even lowered

himself so far as to join in their drinking bouts, and to rival them in debauchery. Every evening Anaxanor, the flute-player, would bring him a bevy of *hetairæ*, perfumed like flowers, who exhibited the grace of their bodies on soft carpets while he stirred them with enervating strains of music. Xantos, the juggler, provided mummers and buffoons for dramatic representations, and Mcdrador whose father had grown rich in the wine-cellars of King Tissaphernes, saw to it that his table should surpass in prodigality and delicacies anything that had ever been seen, even at the courts of Asia where everything partook of an extravagant character.

It goes without saying that such a sumptuous retinue could not be maintained except at the price of much money. How was he to provide this without having recourse to means which are always at the disposal of a conqueror in a conquered country, namely, the increase of taxation? No worse than his predecessors, Antony was not behindhand. Under the pretext that Brutus and Cassius had exacted much from these provinces he claimed still heavier imposts. Certain towns had been put by them under very heavy tribute and these suffered fresh charges. "That will teach them," said Antony with his boisterous laugh, "that they supported the wrong cause!"

These exactions were not however received everywhere with equal submission. In Cappadocia, when the collector presented himself, Hybreas made bold to reply: "If Mark Antony claims the right to demand from us a double and treble tribute, is it because he can grant us a double and treble harvest?"

This answer, far from displeasing him, delighted the Triumvir who had himself a turn of wit and never forbade others to give expression to it, even at his own expense. He made a jocular retort and exempted from additional taxes the country districts of Cappadocia.

The good faith with which he acted more often than not won for him indulgence. His liberality served as a

corrective to his rapacity. Often he made up to the one what he had taken out of the pockets of the other. Thus it happened that one day before leaving Antioch desirous of rewarding the *chef* who had prepared the excellent repasts on which he and his friends had regaled themselves, he made a present to him of a palace which had been the price of ransom of a rich citizen of Magnesia.

His sojourn at Ephesus went far to complete the demoralisation of Antony. No less dissolute than Antioch, this famous city was depraved in quite a different manner. Completely dominated by the priests ever since the temple of Artemis with its twenty-two marble columns had been reared there, it impressed everything with a religious character, even what was most repugnant to it. Splendid and numerous festivals attracted not only pilgrims but many suspicious individuals to whom the sanctuary offered an inviolable refuge. And all this miscellaneous horde, coming from no one knew where, this extraordinary medley of charlatans, mountebanks, magicians, wonder-workers and sorcerers skilled in exploiting vice as much as superstition, helped to transform these festivals into weird *bacchanalia*. "What disgraceful things taking place under cover of Diana!" people may say. "What licentious infamy under the immaculate daughter of Zeus!" Alas, in quitting Delos and coming to the coast of Syria, where everything was vicious and vile, the chaste goddess had ceased to be herself! She who across the waves only exhaled power and chastity, had become a gross idol of the flesh. As though in changing her place of abode the very essence of her being had deteriorated, the divine huntress had cast aside her bow and arrows; her body had become gross and upon her young virgin bosom some unknown sculptor's unwholesome imagination had hung a triple row of breasts. "O youthful courser of the woods!" they might have been tempted to exclaim on seeing what had been made

of her, "to what den of profanation have thy slender limbs drawn thee!"

As soon as they knew that the Triumvir had set out to visit them the inhabitants of Ephesus, with their mania for deifying everything, resolved to receive him as Dionysus in person. Chariots went before him bearing women disguised as Bacchantes, and a troop of Pans and Satyrs danced around him to the accompaniment of the syrinx. They poured forth upon him titles reserved to the god alone, accompanied by the dithyrambs in which it was customary to celebrate their deity. "Hail to thee, Hercules, dispenser of all joy! Bacchus, to whom we owe the juicy fruit of the vine! Omestes, sweet as the fig, be welcome among us!" During his progress the whole town carried *thyrsi* and garlands, psalteries resounded, and the blue smoke of censers rose in spirals before him as in the shrine of the temple.

If he did not quite believe himself to be the son of Jupiter, Antony, bewildered and fuddled, did not fail to assume his privileges, especially those which placed him above human laws. His fancies knew no bounds. He clothed himself in silk and gold, surrounded himself with a *cortège* of Thiades, and assumed a truly Olympian manner in issuing his decrees.

All this, however, and the flattery of which he continued to be made the object did not make him lose sight of the lucrative purpose of his journey. He was quite ready to allow himself to be worshipped, but only so long as it did not entail the least renunciation of what he had in view. The Ionians made supplication in vain; he would not abate by an *obol* a jot of the two hundred thousand talents which he had decided to extract from them. All they could obtain was a certain delay in the period of payment and this was due to the fact that the petition was presented to him by the fair Corelia who was for the time being the favourite.

Soon becoming weary of being borne from city to city, and judging moreover that it was more fitting to

his dignity to summon the vassal kings to come to him, Antony chose Tarsus as his place of residence, and announced that it would henceforth be his pleasure that they should come to pay their respects to him there. Who could evade this obligation? In inviting them to make their submission they were given to understand that they could only retain their sovereignty by receiving it from his hands.

All came to make their obeisance. From roads thick with dust were seen debouching cavalcades and litters, wide chariots harnessed to oxen, and sometimes even to elephants swaying in their uncouth majesty, followed by long lines of dromedaries carrying the baggage that all Oriental pomp bears in its train. As the cavalcades advanced the glint of lances and armour cleft the air. Their standards displayed strange devices, and from the midst of a veritable hubbub of animals and human beings, their multi-coloured head-dresses appeared. When all this assembly had reached the gates of the city a herald detached himself, and with a silver horn proclaimed the names of the august visitors. Each in turn were similarly announced, among them Kings Antiochus and Sysima, Palemon the Satrap, Herod the ruler of Judæa, Adallas that of Sidon, the Tetrarchs of Lycaonia and Pontus, the Ethnarch of Comagene, and yet others from Thrace and Arabia. Scorched by the sun of distant climes many presented a gloomy and weary countenance. They hated the conqueror, but as soon as they were in his presence a spark lit up their faces for all looked to obtain some dignity, immunity, or liberty. Antony received these petitioners with great pomp, and reclining luxuriously in a tent which served the purpose of a tribunal he held market for his favours.

The report having gone abroad that he sometimes regulated these favours according to the pleasing appearance of his petitioners, princesses hastened to present themselves. Among them came the beautiful Glaphyra whose complaisant charms were able to secure

for her son the throne of Phrygia ; the young widow of Aristobulus to whom he confirmed her crown ; and Mariamne, the loving wife of Herod, who obtained great concessions for her husband although she was very un-complying herself.

But she for whom he was awaiting, the Queen of Egypt, had not yet arrived. How she delayed ! The edict nevertheless concerned her no less than the others. Perhaps he had even issued it only to ensure her presence. The abstention of Cleopatra was all the more surprising inasmuch as there were matters to regulate. As an ally of Rome her conduct during the late war lent itself to unfavourable interpretation. When Cæsar's avengers had requested the help of her fleet why had she not sent it ? A tempest had served her as an excuse, but was it not rather from prudent motives that she had feared to be compromised with either of the two parties ? In any case she should have hastened to justify herself. What reason could be given for the time lost ?

Many times had Antony written inviting her to come, at first in the official and ceremonious tone of one sovereign to another, with all the forms of courtesy then in use. Her replies had been vague. He became more urgent. Then seeing nothing come of it anger entered his soul. Was the daughter of the Lagides mocking him ? Did she forget that her fallen sire owed the recovery of his throne to the condescension of Rome ? And she herself ? . . . To-morrow, if he willed. . . .

He decided one day to write as her lord. But what a lord ! A man tormented by desire, wholly unaccustomed to meet with any opposition, feeling himself turning to exasperation ! But having now launched his thunderbolt he thought, like Jupiter, that the elements would come to do his bidding and that he would witness the submissive arrival of one he had thought to terrify. When he found out that this was not the case, that his commands were no more efficacious than his advances, he tried to forget her. Distractions were not wanting, nor a variety of



Madame Kousnetzoff as Cleopatra

amours, and as if by constant changes each succeeding one had the power to efface the last he passed from one to another with incredible quickness. But the memory of the absent one followed him everywhere. Although no bonds had been formed between them he experienced the rancour that might be felt against a mistress who had deceived and abandoned him. He even came to hate her. All the same he did not cease to await her coming.

Tarsus, like Antioch and Ephesus, was one of the great cities of Asia Minor. Situated almost at the mouth of the Cydnus, that icy river which had acted like a first contact with death on the body of young Alexander, it possessed the animation of a port while its groves of myrtle trees cast a mantle of poetry around it. A taste for letters was general, due to its temple raised to Apollo, and a certain tendency towards the ideal prepared the way for the Apostle who was soon to be born and to preach the Gospel within its walls. Meanwhile Aphrodite had her sanctuary there, in which voluptuous statues were always abundantly provided with offerings bearing witness to the fervour of their worship.

Bathed thus in divine influences, sheltered by the great range of the Taurus mountains, amid rippling streams the perfumed atmosphere of Tarsus made it an enchanting spot wherein to linger. If gratified ambition could satisfy the heart of man Antony would have been perfectly happy, for each day brought him fresh homage and complete submission to his will. But in the bottom of his heart restlessness and discontent were at work. His nature, not altogether coarse, prompted him to regrets of a nobler kind. He would have liked to fix upon some aim for his ambition, to give some meaning to the overflowing exuberance of his life. When dissatisfaction with himself pressed upon him too hardly he demanded some outward compensation, not so much the commonplace enjoyments with which he was beginning to be

nauseated, but some healthy expenditure of physical energy which might, while it lasted, put an end to his brooding. Sometimes he would dash forth on one of those Syrian horses of skin so fine that all the tracery of its veins could be seen and its nostrils seemed to breathe fire; with loosened rein he would cross torrents and valleys without anything being able to stop him. This strenuous exercise would restore his vitality in a moment, but at other times those who saw him abandoning himself to enervating pleasures might think he had quite lost it. All his being became invigorated, he tasted a sense of energetic and rude health as though by devouring space he had followed up some fresh victory more splendid and more brilliant than any whose trophies he already possessed.

More often his gallops took Antony to the shores of the Ægean Sea. Without perhaps being conscious of it he felt a need to behold the sea, to interrogate it. It was fair and peaceful. The declining sun was suffusing it with gold. The rising and falling of its surface looked as though it were breathing. From gazing, and listening to the murmur of its voice upon the strand, he came to liken it to a living creature, to the one for whom he was waiting. His imagination blended them together and made them into alluring and perfidious accomplices, both leagued together in one domination which might have made him the most fortunate man in the world but had left him on the shore solitary and confounded.

Nevertheless the days were passing by, and though he searched the horizon to its furthest limits, though the wind was favourable and the sea was alive with numerous ships, he never discerned the famous galley with its purple sails, which travellers arriving from Alexandria had so often described to him. At last weary and sick of vainly hoping, and feeling the powerlessness of his authority in face of her lack of response, the cause of which he could not guess, doubtless also impelled by that

mysterious force within him bent on working out his destiny, he despatched an ambassador with orders to use the most subtle persuasions to make Cleopatra decide to come.

CHAPTER IV

CLEOPATRA

DAY was just breaking. The room was cool and in shadow. Its walls were streaked with mother-of-pearl. A trellis-work of reeds before the windows permitted only a small amount of light to penetrate. Right at the end on a bed of ivory, the four feet of which were an imitation of those of a leopard, lay Cleopatra. Although motionless on her pillow, her two arms stretched over her head like the curved side pieces of a lyre, and her eye-lids closed, she was no longer asleep. Still languid she extended her supple limbs and pursued those dreams which had just now enchanted her youthful slumber. Since she had received Antony's first letter (and between the lines her woman's intuition had been able to discern an appeal which was not solely that of the Triumvir to a tributary of Rome) she had been dreaming only of him. And so he had not forgotten her! This mighty adventurer, this man of triumphs who was everywhere welcomed as a god, attached an inestimable value to seeing her again.

Had only her pride been in question this assurance alone would have been highly flattering, but it served her interests as a queen equally well, for she had great need of support harassed as she was by tumults and opposition. But was this all? To believe it we should have to lose sight of the fact that Cleopatra was still in all the fever of youth, her full blood had all the energy

of tropical vigour. What was she to do with this burning passion within her, more violent even than a tempest? She required the ardent joys and wild heroism of passions which wound and ravish the heart, and there existed only an exhausting void, the monotony of solitary days in which she saw life slipping away drop by drop, losing itself as water trickling from a bowl. If she had only listened to the impatience of a lively and vigorous nature in haste to climb the last rung of the ladder, she would have thrown herself, on the first invitation from Antony, into the adventure which offered itself. The more her presence was desired the more infallible would be the stimulating effect of delay. As we have seen, she had calculated well, though she went near to losing everything by inspiring Antony with a tone of authority. Submission was the last thing Cleopatra was capable of. Hardly had she felt the bit than, like the thoroughbred she was, her whole being reared up. Because he had reduced to a state of vassalage a collection of degenerate princes, did the Lord of the East imagine that she too would appear, trembling and submissive, before his tribunal! No, no! it was not thus she had a mind to make her appearance.

A footstep on the carpet interrupted these half-waking dreams. It was Charmion, her lady-in-waiting, her confidant and friend, who had access to the Queen at all hours. Brought to Cleopatra when still a child she had been chosen by Ptolemy Auletes from among all the noble families of Athens in order that his well-beloved daughter should always have by her side an agreeable and well-educated companion to speak with her the language of the gods. In addition, Charmion was charged with teaching the young princess the art of walking lightly, dressing herself with taste, and swathing around her body those linen wraps the elegant use of which was perpetuated by the women of Tanagra. The pupil was not long in surpassing her instructress, but their inverted positions did not lessen the intimacy

between them. From the one resulted that entire admiration and blind devotion which was to last until death, and from the other a confidence which had no secrets.

If Charmion on that morning was before her usual time and arrived in haste it was because an unusual event had just happened. At early dawn a Roman galley had entered the port bearing Quintus Dellius, the envoy of Mark Antony.

Cleopatra received this news with profound emotion. We think of things, we wait for them, but when the hour comes we perceive that we are quite unprepared for the shock. That Antony should have decided to despatch an ambassador showed her he must have private news for her ears for which letters were not fitting. What could it be? A renewal perhaps of his invitation. But under what form? She must at least expect reproaches. Did not the apparent disdain of the invited guest merit such? At the idea of this however a smile passed over her pretty mocking lips for she knew too well how to make excuses blossom forth from them. Alas! there was another supposition which kept on troubling her. How should she reply if the envoy was a judge, with a mandate to question her and bring her to book? So far as her alliance with Rome went she was bound down to certain fulfilments. But how would she be able to explain that, notwithstanding the pressing demands which had been repeatedly made, she had never sent any help in the late war?

Charmion was of opinion that the Queen, without further tormenting herself, had only to present herself before Antony as she had done before Cæsar and everything would be satisfactorily arranged. Was she not possessed of that supreme gift of attracting men, causing their minds to vacillate, and preventing them any longer from viewing anything impartially?

In the depths of her heart Cleopatra was not unready to acquiesce in this opinion, at least as far as Antony

was concerned. She knew him, and the power exercised over him by the magnetism of a woman's glance. But who was the messenger he had chosen? What line of action should she take? These reflections gave her some moments' perplexity; then suddenly she resolved to act towards the representative of Antony as she would have done if he had come himself in person. The first thing to do was to make herself beautiful, very beautiful; to choose from among all her *toilettes* the one which would the most irresistibly set off her physical charms. As regards other matters there would be time for her to gain confidence in the course of the interview.

Three blows on a brass gong brought the servants running. While the window hangings were being drawn aside to let in the delicious morning light, and from one end to the other of her apartments each one was going about her daily duties like some bee in a hive, Cleopatra left the bed whereon she had been reclining. In a marble *piscina* a warm bath had been prepared. She descended the six steps, a depth just above her shoulders, and experienced the health-giving effects of the water which glided caressingly around her. A Nubian woman was waiting for her to come out to vigorously friction her transparent skin and then to anoint it with a nard recently come from Sidon. Other women came in turns to minister to her deified body. One to whiten her delicate hands with a lotion of hyssop; another to polish her rosy nails; and another, crouching on her heels, to tint a faint crimson colour the extremities of her small feet and to put on her sandals, soft as a bird's nest.

The hairdresser enjoyed the highest favour among them. Numerous privileges were accorded to the exercise of this art, not the least being the right to approach the Queen more closely and for a longer time than anybody else, to talk to her and sometimes to be consulted and thanked for skill in arranging a feather, a flower, or a diadem in her hair. These delicate functions for the past three years had been fulfilled by Iras, a Persian

girl. The lightness of her fingers and the purity of her breath had made her reputation. Hearing of her fame when the young girl was in the service of Mariamne, the wife of Herod, whose red-gold hair was said to come down to her knees, Cleopatra had had her kidnapped. She thus effected a two-fold stroke, securing for herself an *artiste* of talent—and we know that she wished to have all such in her service—and at the same time taking her away from a woman whose reputed virtues annoyed her.

And so Iras had been brought to the Egyptian court by spice merchants who, under pretence of offering her some rare spices to smell, had put her to sleep and carried her away unresistingly. Although the Egyptian court eclipsed that of Judæa as the sun eclipses the moon, Iras was in tears. "Why dost thou weep," said her companions, envious of her good fortune, "when thou art about to have the signal honour of being tire-woman to the divine Cleopatra?" But Iras had a tender heart. The distinction of her new position could not dazzle her, for she loved Mariamne, and since her separation nothing appeared enviable. At any rate this is how she talked during the first days when she was present at the ceremonies of the royal *toilette* at a distance as a novice.

A day came when Cleopatra, noticing her pale and comely face, spoke to her. In a voice the sound of which was like some incomparable music, she enquired what it was that made the young girl sad. "Is it regret for thy family, for some lover, for thy native land?" No, Iras had seen the death of her mother, and had left behind no one dear on the banks of the Araxes. What made her inconsolable was that she had left Jerusalem, the palace of Herod, where the queen had shown her so much kindness.

Of little account as were the feelings of a slave in the eyes of one who was later to inspire such wonderful devotion, Cleopatra was nevertheless struck by the sincere affection which Iras had expressed. It was at the time when, sad and lonely, she had returned from

Rome, and she wished to attach this exiled flower to herself. Nothing was easier. A few kind words, a few gifts offered with delicacy, very soon caused the poor little heart which had been closed by grief to open. The gift of her freedom a little later on was to complete her conquest, and again enkindle one of those fires of adoration of which no divinity ever had a more fervent example—a fire ever ready to blaze up and consume itself for the Queen; ready also, the day she ceased to give light, to likewise extinguish itself.

“Quick, Iras,” she said that morning on which she had determined to be more beautiful than ever, “unloosen my hair-net and try to execute one of thy masterpieces!”

Seated before a table loaded with different objects—combs of all sizes, phials of rainbow-tinted glass, tiny pots filled with unguents, sponges, dainty powder-puffs soaked in iris and white-lead, golden tortoises the perforated shells of which held long pins—the Queen bent her head, and while two negresses, motionless as bronze, inclined the burnished silver mirror in which her image was reflected, Iras buried the tortoise-shell combs deep into her hair.

No one was more skilful than the young Persian in handling the flowing mass. One might have said it was indeed a pastime to spread it out, seize hold of it, wind it in coils, make it stand out, and arrange it every day in a different manner around the brow of her mistress. These varieties of *coiffure* were a subject of inexhaustible conversation between them. They discussed their becoming effects, added various ornaments on the impulse of the moment, and decided which were suitable for this or that occasion. But what was their choice to be to-day? There was not time to delay in experimenting. It was necessary to decide at once under which of her many effects Cleopatra should approach the envoy of Mark Antony. An instant's reflection made her reject the *Pschent*, her diadem, or anything imposing which

would present a ceremonious character; it was as a woman only, a pretty woman, that she must present herself. The Athenian style was adopted—a simple coil fastened by a ribbon above the neck, with three fillets outlining the small head resting on the thick undulations of her dark brown coils.

Iras was no less an expert in the secret of paints and perfumes. From a sojourn in Phoenicia she had brought back a recipe for making rhodium, composed of the essence of roses, liliun in which only the pulp of lilies was used, and cyprium believed to be made from the flower of privet. As prepared by her, the oil of *œsipon* and *marjoram* had not their equal in rendering limbs supple, and she was unrivalled in her knowledge of how to give to the skin a polish like marble by rubbing it with a powder made from pounded mother-of-pearl. It was to her dear Iras alone that Cleopatra entrusted the art of bringing the roses to her cheeks, of accentuating the raised arch of her magnificent eye-brows, and of introducing under her eye-lashes with a soft swan's feather the extract of *sibium* which gave an additional shade to their natural dark colour.

When she had been duly shod, her hair dressed, and impregnated with essences from head to foot, the women of the wardrobe succeeded. They brought in great chests in which her robes were laid out without a fold so as not to crease or impair their freshness. Taking off the covers they held out one, two, three, four, for the Queen to make her selection. Her choice fell on a long silk tunic of yellow saffron across which were embroidered pale narcissus flowers. Fastened to the shoulders by two clasps of electron the tunic left the chest and arms uncovered. Over this was worn a transparent drapery of a fabric woven, according to the legend, by the women of Cos from the mists of the air on fine spring mornings, called nowadays gossamer.

Cleopatra urged on her women, finding they were taking too long in arranging a fold, adjusting a girdle, or

performing those thousand frivolous details which on other occasions amused her. She was in a hurry to be finished with it, to confront the man whom she was to engage in a thrilling passage of arms. After a pearl necklace had been hung around her neck, and her wrists and fingers had been circled with rings of precious stones, she left her chamber with a last gaze into the mirror which returned a perfect and enchanting picture.

The ambassador chosen by Antony was the Quintus Dellius of the *Odes* of Horace, one of the pleasantest and most astute men of the period. A fine wit, an historian, even a poet in his spare hours, he was possessed of a character as supple as it was intelligent, and just as he was ever ready to turn an epigram he was known to be disposed to be accommodating in any circumstances likely to be advantageous. The method he had always found successful was to attach himself to the person of a powerful man, to use all his capabilities in serving him, and when fortune changed to leave him for another. Thus before the battle of Philippi he had been the friend of Cassius, and after Actium, he became inseparable from Octavius. For the moment, judging that Antony had all the chances in his favour and that he was not the kind of man to lose them, his devotion towards him was sincere. No one was therefore better qualified than this skilful intermediary, who was also a great judge of women, to bring to a successful issue the mission which took him to Alexandria.

When, surrounded by her guard, the Queen had ascended the steps of the throne which was raised in front of a hanging painted with foliage and birds, he was ushered in. He was a Roman of short stature, with fine features and a keen and smiling expression, whose elegant bearing at once marked the aristocrat. On the threshold he saluted the Queen with the point of his sword lowered and his left hand carried to his right shoulder. Instead of advancing at once he remained for a moment motionless,

looking at Cleopatra as though admiration had bereft him of all his faculties. Then he said :

" Puissant Queen, my master, Mark Antony, saluteth thee and wisheth thee glory, happiness and long prosperity."

" Thou wilt likewise convey to him my good wishes, she replied with a charming smile, and at once added : " Victory indeed hath already fully realised them."

He answered :

" Undeceive thyself, Divine One, the happiness of Antony will only be complete, he will feel himself truly happy only on that day when thou shalt have honoured him with thy visit."

This beginning was of good augury, but how could she trust what might only be the usual preliminary formalities of courtesy ? Cleopatra was impatient to know whether the envoy had not some other communication to make, some message to give revealing Antony's displeasure.

By her orders they were left alone ; thus the interview became less formal and they were able to feel more at their ease.

" What bringeth thee to me ? " asked the Queen in a tone of playful frankness which drew forth a similar freedom towards herself. " Tell me ; hide nought from me. I must know to what end the Triumvir doth solicit my presence, what his intentions are towards me." And the expression of her face added : " If thou dost obey me, if thy words be sincere, thou shalt not have cause to repent."

When she knew positively that Antony had only sent an ambassador in his impatience to see her again, to renew their former relations of friendship, her anxiety was lightened. She had a feeling of breathing more freely, as when one opens a window. And so her calculations had not deceived her ! By putting off her visit she had sharpened Antony's desire, had pushed him to extremities. But was he not the man to make her expiate this trick of coquettishness ? Was he not meditating some vengeance ?

She excused her delay by pretexts which did not however deceive Dellius. He was still less deceived when, posing as a timorous woman, she pretended to have been turned away from going by reports which had come to her of the reception offered by Antony to certain of the princesses at Tarsus.

Nevertheless, thinking it well to reassure her, he protested. "What! People like Glaphyra and Eutrope! Dethroned suppliants, or fearing to be such! Vassals running to the feet of the conqueror with most crooked intentions! How could she compare herself to them?" Then adopting the language of a priest addressing an idol, he said:

"Well beloved of Osiris! August Queen whose sceptre extendeth over land and sea! Woman above all women! Know thou that thy presence is awaited with as much honour as ardour! When thou shalt set foot upon Roman territory festivals of thanksgiving shall be celebrated and whole peoples shall pour forth their homage to thee."

But it was not this kind of thing that Cleopatra was anxious about. A word as to the inner sentiments of Antony would have interested her far more. How could she find out? How could she know if he were convoking her as a sovereign with whom an alliance was to be renewed, or as a vassal who had accounts to settle, or quite simply, as a man who still cherished recollections in his heart?

Watching her closely Dellius began to understand what an exceptional creature he was in the presence of, and why his master attached such high value to the success of his mission. It was not alone her beauty which made her unique. The longer one looked at her the more thoughtful one became; one felt the birth of an indefinable uneasiness and disquietude. If her vivacity at one moment was like a pulsation of life, unable to contain itself, at other moments her warm languor gave promise of delights never before experienced.

An intuition which showed the penetration of his mind gave him a presentiment of the supreme position which such a woman was bound to hold in the life of the Emperor. Antony was approaching his fortieth year—that fatal age to voluptuous natures. It was evident that the love affairs with which his youth had been crowded no longer satisfied him, and that he had reached the time when the need for some strong sentiment arises in the heart of men who, without having fallen in love have spent themselves largely in its counterfeits. A great and real love, should it present itself, would be hailed by him as his salvation. He would give himself up entirely to it, and even though the woman who could inspire it might be little deserving, she could not fail to gain an ascendancy over him, the limits of which it was impossible to foresee. Perceiving in a flash that Cleopatra would be that woman who was to rule Antony's destiny, he determined to neglect no means to carry out his mission and bring her to Tarsus; also to make her his supporter and friend.

From that moment, like the clever man he was, he made himself the interpreter of the sentiments of his master. He depicted him in love with her—a condition which certainly Antony was prepared to welcome, but had not yet reached. He alleged that the memory of Cleopatra obsessed him and that for whole days he was consumed in expectation. At the mouth of the Cydnus his silhouette might be seen, beaten by the winds, watching the arrival of ships. It would be cruel to prolong this anxiety. With one word she could put an end to it! If she would only utter this word of promise Antony would be happier than if conquering kingdoms.

"Besides, could it be possible," added Dellius, as though speaking to himself, "that anyone could approach the divine Cleopatra without treasuring, on leaving her, a regret that only the joy of seeing her again could dispel?"

An inexpressible perturbation agitated the heart of

the Queen. She had the feeling of approaching that unique and formidable moment when destiny is fixed. All her being was trembling. An impatient ardour was urging her on to future joys. She would have liked to throw herself towards them. She would have liked to cry out, "I go! I will start to-morrow!" But the attitude she had adopted since the beginning of this affair held her bound. She must play her part right up to the end, she must show herself hesitating and difficult to win over; above all, she must let no one suspect her secret desire to be put under compulsion!

"Since I must," she conceded, "since the Triumvir exacteth it, I will go and offer him my homage."

But this was not the way Dellius meant her to take it. His faith in women was too suspicious to place any trust in a promise based on the fulfilment of a duty, and vague in addition. He wanted a formal promise, to feel that she was not withholding anything. His protestations began again. "It was not as her lord that Antony was awaiting the Queen of Egypt. He implored her presence, and would receive her with the profound respect of a man beholding the approach of a goddess."

Words like these could not fail to win her consent, already given in the recesses of her heart. Cleopatra's pride was saved; she had made herself sufficiently sought after. Smilingly she now assented, and promised she would embark for Tarsus before the long days declined.

Although in haste to return and announce the good news, Dellius accepted her invitation to pass some days at Alexandria. This delay did not appear without its uses, for though his mission was accomplished, he did not consider his own part ended. He was secretly persuaded that by drawing Cleopatra to Tarsus she would become Antony's mistress, and that he would win for himself a title to the gratitude of both. So in pursuance of a purpose in harmony with the thoughts of both they amused themselves with long conversations, the subject of which, more often than not, was Antony.

Dellius skilfully sought to enlighten the young woman so as to form in her an accurate judgment of the Triumvir, his tastes and character, which she would know how to make use of when the occasion offered. Without doubt Antony had always loved pomp but, intoxicated as he had been with the incense of Asia, he had become extraordinarily sensitive to appearances; nothing was too sumptuous in his eyes, no festivity appeared to be fine enough. "How gloomy and severe did the Rome of to-day appear to him now!" said Dellius. "How ravished he would be if he could but behold all the magnificence which aboundeth here!"

He needed to say nothing further; Cleopatra had understood. A scheme at once suggested itself to her imagination. She already determined under what aspect and with what prodigious scenic display she would make her appearance before Antony. Her preparations began on the morrow. Although she hurried them forward, for her eagerness to depart was now sincere, they continued for nearly one moon. Could less time be required to get ready the amazing state in which, as another Queen of Sheba, she was to start on her progress?

The sun had risen in a perfect atmosphere. It was one of those summer days when all things are bathed in mist, when every outline seems to partake of some delicious mystery. Seated in front of his Tribunal, under a group of sycamores shading the public square of Tarsus, Antony was exercising his functions of Proconsul. In the presence of dynasts, magi and prætors, he dealt out indifferently in accordance with his somewhat rudimentary conscience, the awards of Roman justice. A crowd surrounded him, for many desired to obtain some indulgence, some favour, and everyone in turn was permitted to prefer their request.

A sudden commotion arose, interrupting the silence while they listened to the speech of an advocate. People came running from the banks of the Cydnus to tell of

strange happenings. From group to group rumours went around. The name of Aphrodite was on everyone's lips. Carefully fostered by the priests, their religious beliefs had familiarised their minds with the nearness of the gods and their intervention in the affairs of men. The rumour now going round surpassed however the most amazing fables. It was said that the daughter of Zeus was coming up the river in a golden galley resonant with strains of music. They recognised her, not only by her beauty which had a superhuman radiance, but by the attributes whereby painters and sculptors were accustomed to represent her. Couched on an enormous shell she appeared to be rising from the waves. She was enveloped in a light-blue veil. Suspended by ropes a troop of Nereids were waving fans, and little cupids were shedding forth sweet smelling petals at her feet. Every moment new-comers added fresh wonders. The sails of the galley were of silk; the awning was decorated with purple; the silver-handled oars, rowed by fifty negroes of the land of Cush, struck the water in unison; light vapours were coming from the vessel wafting afar the scent of incense and cinnamon.

Curiosity had gradually emptied the *agora*. Those who but a moment before were jealously disputing their places around the Tribunal, had quickly disappeared. An increasing multitude was now thronging the banks of the Cydnus. *Vivats* could be heard and cries of admiration. The whole city of Tarsus soon invaded the quays, and in a delirium of enthusiasm acclaimed the goddess, giving thanks to Zeus for having sent her to them.

On hearing what was taking place Antony was seized with giddiness. He put his hand before his eyes. He could hardly breathe! Without a doubt it was she! The goddess for whom his impatient heart had waited so long! She had come to take him by surprise!

As he could not, with any decency, mingle with the crowd and run to meet her, he summoned Dellius.

"Go," he said, "receive Cleopatra with all honour.

Place at her disposal everything befitting and bid her sup with me at my palace this evening."

The session of the Tribunal having been thus interrupted, Antony had no longer the necessary calm to resume it. Besides, what mattered to him now the affairs of others, even those of the Republic, in face of the colossal event just come about? Assessors, registrars, and witnesses were dismissed, and with seething brain he granted wholesale all the indulgences his petitioners had that day come to ask, as though he felt the need of radiating upon others the joy he felt to be suffocating him.

Dellius brought back her answer. Cleopatra had been very sensible of the invitation the Triumvir had been good enough to offer her, but on this first evening it was she who presumed to ask him as her guest. At the hour of supper she would expect him on her galley.

It was then true! It was really her! She had come! She had crossed the sea in order to meet him! Shortly he would see her, he would be reclining at the same table. How should he approach her? "What shall I say?" he asked himself, for it is never what one is most eager to express that comes most readily into one's mind. He tried to picture the scene. His attitude would be gallant, certainly! How could he help that? But, before all else, he had decided to be majestic. His title of Triumvir placed him above every sovereign. Were it only for the sake of his colleagues he was bound to abdicate nothing of his prestige. As Rome's ally Cleopatra had failed in her engagements and he must question her. With all possible diplomacy, but firmly, he would ask her, "What didst thou do during the war? Wherefore didst thou withdraw thyself?"

Meanwhile, in order to suitably present himself before her he proceeded to don his magnificent silver cuirass on which the image of Achilles being plunged into the Styx by his mother had been graven by an Athenian artist. He drenched his hair and face with perfumes, and with proud,

martial bearing, his head held high and body erect as though he were entering the battlefield, he passed down the avenue leading to the river. The late hour had deepened the shadows of the plane trees. Between the line of trunks the ruddy copper-coloured glow of the setting sun could still be seen to the right. By the time he reached the river bank these gleams had faded away but in front of him the wonderful galley shone forth! From the tops of the masts as far as the water-line she was a mass of draperies and torches. They could not all be seen, but the whole formed a blazing glow which seemed to light up the sky.

This wonderful supper at Tarsus, this meeting by night of two beings who were to shake the world and leave across the centuries such a prodigious track, is certainly one of the most fascinating moments in history. Leaving aside the splendour of the reception, and the prodigality of an entertainment with which the daughter of the Lagides had promised herself to confound the most puissant man among the Romans, in order to show him that the pomp in which he lived was mere rusticity in comparison with her own manners and habits, we cannot see them come together at last without some emotion. As for Cleopatra, her plan of action had been fixed long back, namely, to take possession of the mind of Antony by using every means which her grace and intelligence offered, and to hold him prisoner in such sort that he could no longer leave the circle of her enchantments. For this she had at her command all the ease of a great lady and a heart as yet untroubled by love. At this *tête-à-tête*, so cleverly managed, it was he who felt embarrassed and constrained. He was certainly accustomed to women, to speak freely with them, but with this one, with her cunning artifices, the bewilderment of her *toilette* and that indefinable smile which left him doubtful whether she was mocking or inviting him to kneel before her, he felt abashed.

"At last!" he said on entering, and this was all the reproach he ventured to address.

The cry of his whole being contained such impatience, exorcised at last, such joy, that Cleopatra already felt him under her empire. Courteously she proffered her excuses for not having come sooner. A multitude of duties had kept her back. Egypt was causing her so many anxieties. For two years the crops had failed and the population was growing restive. She had had to provide them food, and for a long time she had felt she could not leave them.

Without replying, without even noticing the vagueness of the reasons she alleged, without telling himself that none of them could have had any weight if only the will had been there, Antony gazed at Cleopatra with ecstatic eyes and murmured :

"Thou art still more beautiful than ever!" "Dost thou think so?" she replied, while a charming smile suffused her countenance.

Then taking her guest by the hand she led him to the stern of the ship which had been converted into a grove. Two purple couches were ranged on either side of the table. They extended themselves, and while partaking of a *menu* of rare delicacy, quaffing from exquisite goblets, and listening to the music which wrapped them in voluptuousness, they talked familiarly. Their thoughts took them back to memories of the past, those occasions on a former day when, around a glittering table, in brilliantly lighted halls, Antony had looked at Cleopatra, had been ready to declare his love but had felt himself held back by the force of circumstances so often opposed to our wills. That same powerlessness came again this evening, both from the presence of strangers and from their mutual positions. An explanation separated them, an explanation they *must* have in order that the political clouds enveloping them might be dissipated.

Cleopatra took the initiative. To wait to be accused and to be obliged to defend herself did not at all suit her character. Besides, what did she risk? However much at fault she may have been, was she not sure of an

indulgent judge? Whether she took the offensive or the defensive, did she not feel capable of winning? But she preferred to attack. Forestalling him she made complaint of the tribulation she had had to undergo on the part of Cassius in order to uphold the good cause. Three times had he summoned her to send reinforcements, and on each refusal a deluge of menaces had been poured forth.

"The miserable fellow!" groaned Antony. Quickly she went on. "And thou too, Antony, thou didst count upon me; thou didst expect the aid of my fleet. And thou hadst every right to expect it! Of my intentions thou couldst have had no doubt; I was thy most trusted ally. How could my good wishes not have been on thy side, thou, the avenger of my dear Cæsar!"

The atmosphere was changed. The conversation was taking a turn quite other than Antony had foreseen. Already he did not dare to avow how he had deceived himself. He had come as a man resolved to question her, to obtain some justification or at least some excuse, but found himself listening only to the sound of her enchanting voice.

When in a coaxing tone she reproached him, saying: "Thou hast been angry with me?" he denied it. "I never wished to be," he added.

"Yea! I know it. It was at Laodicea. Thou didst complain that thou hadst waited for me in vain."

But she was quite ready with an excuse. Cleopatra related how the gods, whose designs we cannot fathom, were opposed to the execution of her plans. Scarcely had her squadron put to sea than a tempest was let loose. Many of her galleys perished. She herself, terrified and ill, only owed her safety to chance. With great difficulty, on a vessel making water, she had regained the port of Alexandria. And when the disaster had been repaired, it was too late! The allies had just won at Philippi.

Presented in this manner the conduct of the ally of Rome had been not only irreproachable but indeed

worthy of praise. This Antony did not spare. He even exhibited keen emotion at the thought of the dangers she had incurred. He declared her to have been sublime, heroic. He even went near to offering his apologies. Had he not been like a madman obstinately set on expecting her? But then, separated from her, had not life been a misery, a torment day by day? Everywhere, at all hours, he had been expecting her, always hoping to see her come. Wherever she was not present, he felt dreary. He loved her, he had always loved her. Apart from her he could take no pleasure. And now that she was there he felt his passion all aflame. There was a fire in him which could never be extinguished, a love which yearned for hope.

Cleopatra listened gravely without replying. His words caused her an inner fluttering, an intense desire to tell herself: "The lord of the world belongeth to me." Doubtless too she was moved by his impassioned accents, his burning emotion, which reacted on her unconsciously. She felt how sweet it would be to abandon herself, to be caught up by this amazing whirlwind. But some time had now passed since, at their first meeting, she had yielded to Cæsar. The *ingénue* of those days had learnt experience. The passing years, events, and her sojourn at Rome, had taught her many things. She was now fully aware of the value of her favours. Though quite decided to grant them, to take possession of Antony, to unite their two destinies, to begin over again with him the part she had once lost, she meant to choose her own proper time.

The supper had ended. Reclining on her cushions in the attitude of a young girl, emanating the very picture of voluptuousness, Cleopatra looked at Antony.

"I love thee," he murmured

"Hold thy peace," she said gently, as though scolding a child who is very dear to one. "Speak not thus to me."

But such a wild impulse seized him that before she

had time to draw back he left his place and came over to her impetuously, placing his lips to her enchanting face.

No, he would not keep silent. He had waited for this moment too long, he had suffered too much by her delay. Till now all hopes of happiness had deserted him, and he had come to the point of being disgusted with life. But now that she was here, the idol worshipped in his heart, was he to keep silent? Was he not to proclaim the love which had become his life?

The young woman stood up. The cressets and torches which were now guttering and ready to go out, made her into an entrancing statue of gold, one of those divinities around whom is offered the worship of coruscating fire. She looked at Antony and asked herself whether in spite of her firm decision she could for long hold off a lover of this kind.

"Listen," she said, "it is late. I am very weary. Leave me to rest this night."

Antony did not budge. Throwing himself back on the divan with his elbow on his knee and his chin resting on his hand, he gazed distractedly at the beautiful creature. He would have liked to remain there for ever beneath the stars which, hour by hour as the torches grew feebler, became more brilliant, seemed to come nearer to him, to take an interest in his happiness.

"Come, we must bid good-night," she said.

With tender eyes he implored: "Let me not part without a promise."

"To-morrow it will be my turn to sup with thee," she replied with her inscrutable smile.

"To-morrow!" sighed Antony. And trembling, crestfallen, his mind assailed by images of a happiness he had believed to be near but from which for a space he had now been robbed, he regained the bank.

On the morrow and the following days they saw each other often, or rather they left each other no more. These

were days of apprenticeship in a passion which was to invade them both, to envelop them like a fire. But if Antony, from the first evening, lost all clear perception, Cleopatra preserved her own. Her intellectual vision ruled her feelings. Shrewd and strong she looked the future in the face. Her mind saw the re-birth of old dreams, of projects long since cherished. If Antony, as a statesman, was far inferior to Cæsar, the power at his command was no less than his ; and did not his feebler character and weaker intellect hold the advantage of making her own supremacy secure, of governing him as suited her purpose ?

At once she determined to make a trial. She cherished a great and unquenchable grudge against her sister who had dared to dispute her throne and had nearly supplanted her. Escaping from her vengeance this sister, Arsinoe, had taken refuge in the Temple of Diana at Ephesus, and under the protection of the high priest Megabyses, had been treated as a queen. This insult to Cleopatra fell directly under the jurisdiction of the Triumvir. He alone could put an end to it. She asked that the princess might be put to death together with the minister Serapion who had aided her rebellion and flight.

The execution of these personages was not to Antony's liking. The memories left at Ephesus by this jovial *bon-viveur* had brought him much favour in their eyes. Was he to compromise this for the mere caprice of a woman ? Was he to lose his reputation as an easy-going Proconsul ? Besides, by violating the privileges of the priests, he would run the risk of making many enemies. He pleaded, not for those she had incriminated, but for himself, representing how amazed people would be if after having exercised clemency to his own countrymen whom he had conquered he should show himself implacable in regard to persons against whom, as a Roman, he had no complaint to make.

The plea was not admitted. There was something in

Cleopatra's character, not exactly cruel, as has been said, but domineering and intolerant of resistance. Arsinoe had disputed her authority ; so long as Arsinoe breathed she could never be happy. Had she not always to fear some fresh attempt upon her crown on the part of this rebel ?

Antony suggested imprisonment,

No, it was the head of Arsinoe that she demanded. He succeeded in saving Megabyses only, and that thanks to the intervention of the Ephesians who threatened to place the city in a state of siege rather than allow their venerated high priest to be touched.

In this way began that succession of little skirmishes in which Cleopatra, ever victorious, was to substitute little by little her own secret power for his seeming authority as a man, her own well-disciplined will in place of his, deflected as it had become by love. What did she give in return for this first triumph ? Her method of delay had succeeded too well to give it up at once. Before slaking that thirst with which the Triumvir was consumed, her ambitious coquetry determined to bring him to such a point that his entire life would not suffice to quench it. While holding out scraps, prudence suggested that she should keep his complete happiness in reserve until they were at Alexandria. Had this not from the beginning been the surest means of extracting from him what she needed to consolidate her throne ? And as to keeping him, was it not at Alexandria, within the enchanting walls of Bruchium, surrounded by the prestige of its palaces and festivities, on that bed of roses on which Cæsar had lingered, that she had the certainty, better than anywhere else, of proving herself the sorceress from whom there would be no escape for ever ?

CHAPTER V

THE INIMITABLE LOVERS

WHEN parting they agreed to meet again in the winter. Antony put a zeal into settling up matters in Asia Minor that no one would have credited him with. From early morning he was at his task and did not slacken until the evening. Often he would even receive delegates and sign documents when supper was awaiting him. Working at this high pressure he soon regulated the frontier dispute between Herod and his neighbours ; assigned to each legion its station and nominated Procurators ; in a word, put everything in order so as to permit of the absence of their lord. His departure was fixed for one of the last days in November. Thick clouds were rolling over the sky, the sea was grey and stormy. But what did that matter ? The wind was blowing from the North, straight in the direction of Alexandria.

The presence of the Triumvir was awaited there with diverse feelings. Those who still believed in the vitality of Egypt, in her ability to govern herself without foreign assistance, deplored the coming of the Roman in whom they divined a fresh lover for the Queen, and a future master doubtless less conciliatory than Cæsar and, as report said, more greedy. Others, mindful of the promises of the god, saw rather an ally in the conqueror of Philippi, a collaborator through whom the old glory of the kingdom might be restored. When it became known that he was to land quite simply, bringing no fleet

or troops, but just as a great lord returning to a great lady a visit received, divisions ceased. All agreed that it was a visit of courtesy and they must welcome him accordingly. Besides, the Queen's orders were positive. She had not forgotten the lessons learnt from Dellius. The feeble exhibition of splendour she had been able to give at Tarsus had been too much appreciated for her not to hasten to display the real thing. Determined that Antony should meet with a reception in her own country which would obliterate Ephesus and Antioch, she scattered gold in profusion and promised rewards to those who could invent some new form of decoration, some display which had not been seen elsewhere.

Although the harbour was beflagged with banners hung from one end to the other, and the processions were magnificent, with numerous *pylons*, carpets, and triumphal arches reared along the route he was to take, Antony paid little attention to them; or rather these exterior signs of welcome seemed to be the natural accompaniment to the gladness that was within him. The very voices acclaiming him struck on his ear as the echo of his own inner exultation. In truth, one sole thought filled his mind. He was on his way to see her again, the one being who had left him no repose since they had parted. He was going to see her again. He would hold her in his arms. It was through her that he looked at everything. Desire for her had become the rhythm of the universe; it coloured all.

Four galloping horses bore him along the Royal Road. Above its terraces Bruchium reared its rose-coloured *façade*. He was approaching! He was getting nearer! In a moment he would be face to face with Cleopatra! "Shall I possess her at last?" he asked himself. She had sworn to be his. It was on that understanding that they had bid good-bye. But could one ever be certain with a woman, with *her* especially who was so unusual and changeable? The riddle posed itself tumultuously in his heart. The horses were now mounting the last

incline without stopping. Antony found himself before the entrance to the palace.

High up on the top step Cleopatra was awaiting him surrounded by priests in white mitres waving censers, and officers in brilliant uniforms. With the evident intention of recalling the days at Tarsus she wore a dark blue transparent robe which made her resemble a Nereid. Necklets of chrysoprase rolled down like water on her breast, and on her girdle, clasped with a turquoise of the colour of the sea, were graven mysterious characters.

When Antony appeared she threw him a branch of laurel and went down to meet him. On bended knee, with arms extended, he greeted her with a gesture of adoration. They took each other's hands and for a moment talked in a low voice. When they ascended the steps of the great stairway together, they spoke no more; they smiled. The expression on their faces was that of sublime and enchanting harmony.

From that day perfect happiness enwrapped them. For her there was no more scheming, no more coquetry; for him no more that anxiety which sometimes comes to men from long habits of libertinism and makes them ask themselves: "Shall I be happy to-morrow? Can I still be happy?" There was no longer anything but real, absolute, supreme love. Some minds, scouting any romantic interpretation, have seen and have only wished to see in this celebrated adventure a scheming intrigue, and in Cleopatra an ambitious courtesan. If we must allow that the persecutions she had suffered in her youth had made her consider love as a means to an end, and Cæsar as a protector to whom she might look for the restoration of her patrimony, and later on, for the crown of an empress if death had only left her time, it was not so in the case of Antony. Doubtless at the outset, when she was still amid the chills of solitude, she might have conceived plans and ambitious designs. Deprived of the great man on whom she had built up her fortune it is not

improbable that she dreamed of replacing him, of renewing with Antony who might soon become his successor those bonds so fatally cut in two by the dagger of Brutus.

But that is to refuse to take into account the fire which is enkindled when two young, beautiful, passionate beings come together. If the journey to Tarsus had been a snare, Cleopatra was caught in her own net. She set out upon it to conquer, sure of imposing her own law; love was waiting for her there, to make her captive in her turn. However dazzling the titles borne by Antony, his personal attractions counted for much more. He possessed in a rare degree all the gifts of making himself loved, and we may truly state that in spite of the premeditations, the urgent exigencies, and the intrigues which never ceased to be mingled with her sentiments, Cleopatra brought him a sincere heart. What further need have we to assure us than the final tragedy? When a *liaison* ends in the voluntary death of two lovers, when they put themselves to death rather than that one should survive the other, what do the weaknesses preceding that hour count? Cleopatra has written her name on the page of history and must be accounted a true woman.

For the moment, who thought of death? On an unrestrained course the lovers followed day by day a life becoming more free, more given up to passionate pleasures. Every moment they were together fresh dreams were realised; each gratified desire gave birth to a new one. They had within them an inexhaustible spring in which they refreshed themselves without their thirst being ever quenched. Love is only complete when tenderness alternates with delight, when the heart mingles its fragrance of poetry with the flesh. In Cleopatra, who had never loved, this poetry blossomed forth quite naturally; it came forth from her young heart as a bunch of spring flowers; she had all their waywardness, their fresh, light grace. With Antony it was with surprise that he was plunged into unutterable delights. After all the abuse he had made of himself,

his soul might have received a mortal blow and lost the faculty of idealising his sensations. It was nothing of the sort. Passion had made a new man of him. Like a flame which defies diminution the love which Cleopatra inspired raised him above his soiled past.

The overflowing happiness they felt in being together was shed on their surroundings. We have seen what an incomparable museum of art and nature Bruchium was. The Queen took a delicate pleasure in showing its wonders to her lover and sharing with him its delights. When she plucked a rose to give him it was as though she offered part of herself; her breath resembled its fragrance. When she pointed out some favourite object of beauty—a marble figure on which the chisel of Praxiteles had bestowed its grace; a Hercules in bronze which Ptolemy VII. had brought back from Corinth; a bas-relief on which were traced episodes from the Iliad; when she made him listen to sweet music, or to some page from the great Greek dramatists, a contact was set up between them so close and spiritual that it might even be said their souls touched one another.

This influence was reciprocal. If at times Antony allowed himself to become refined and polished like the Lagides, at other moments his natural rusticity regained the upper hand and took its revenge.

What stories of the orgies at Bruchium have not been told! In truth the moderation of our lives in these days, the conformity of all ranks to one level, the insignificant fortunes at our disposal, the vices lacking in amplitude and restricted by the network of Christian laws, hardly enable us to judge of the extravagances of antiquity. The proportions have nothing similar. How commonplace, how entirely wrapped in prudery are our modern *fêtes*, as compared with the *saturnalia* into which the ancients flung themselves! Our hygienic meals, by the side of the amazing feasts of Balthazar! What are our monuments, our assembly halls, our pleasure haunts? Mere beggary if we compare them with the colossal

buildings on which a Rameses or a Darius expended thirty years of their reigns to construct, and which were to last as many centuries. What are our most magnificent palaces when we think of those huge blocks of stone out of which those of the kings of old were made; the colossal flight of steps giving approach to them; the avenues of obelisks; the forest of columns with which they were girt about! The most splendid court in Europe seems paltry if we place it beside that of a Satrap or even a Roman Proconsul. The world in those times belonged only to a few privileged mortals who alone might enjoy and monopolise the full possibilities of life. The rest of humanity was content to look on.

The first occupants of our planet give us a picture of super-men. Their efforts surpass our imagination. Disposing of unlimited gold, granite and brass, they were able to realise their most gigantic dreams. The real proportions of their existence escape us. They were familiarised to pleasures under which our enfeebled organisations would succumb. The suns which shone upon their cloudless delights are extinguished. To-day a sadness weighs over our minds harassed with the virus of the ideal. An Antony, a Cleopatra had the good fortune to arrive in time to know the sensation of letting life run by like some fair torrent. The spring-time sap of the world was still bubbling pure in their veins with no alloy of the sense of sin. To be happy was all the wisdom they knew. These disciples of Epicurus were concerned solely in embellishing the present hour, in adapting it to the desires which nature engendered in them. In the beautiful surroundings of a city which seemed to have been fashioned only for their apotheosis they lived unutterable days, in which nothing seemed too high or too low to add to their pleasure. As bold in their conceptions as they were in carrying them into effect they might in very truth call themselves: "The Inimitable Lovers."

A few details will give us some glimpse of the

magnificence with which Cleopatra treated her guest. Wishing to dazzle as much as to please him, she doubled the customary splendour of her court, giving orders that everything should be perfect and in profusion. A certain Philotas, who had come from Amphissa to complete his studies at the Serapeum, relates how he made the acquaintance of one of the stewards who proposed to him that he should pay a visit to the palace kitchens. Eight wild boars, ready spitted, were waiting their turn to be roasted. Philotas exclaimed, "What a dinner! The Queen is expecting much company?" What was his surprise on learning that the royal table would be smaller than usual that evening—a dozen guests in all. "What? Eight wild boars for twelve stomachs!" "Knowest thou not, Philotas," the steward informed him, "that roast meat is only tasteful when cooked just to the right point. Now, it is impossible here to know beforehand when the repast is going to take place. When the hour of dinner cometh the Triumvir may have a fancy for a game of chess, or for a gallop on the Canopus road, and there is nothing else to be done but to shut off the fire and wait. At another time he may say he is famishing and needs must that the dinner be served before the hour. It is not therefore one boar only we must hold in readiness, nor one quarter of beef, nor one or two geese and a few guinea-fowl; the number is without limit."

This anecdote affords one example among many, not only of the prodigality, but of the happy carelessness in the midst of which that great spoilt child Antony moved. He must indeed have received full indulgence to have been able to substitute his own good pleasure for the usual rules of good breeding, and to indulge freely according to his haphazard whims! In very truth Cleopatra existed only for him. Leaning on the bosom of her hero she felt her heart throb only through his own pulsations. At some moments, closing her eyes and remaining silent, it seemed to her that together they formed but one being, that their caresses sufficed to give them perfect happiness; at other moments, on the contrary, her one

thought was to invent amusements to distract her lover and herself.

This quest was becoming ever more exacting and was tending to render her brain, as well as her senses, quite feverish ; it also led her into all kinds of follies. One of them has remained celebrated. It happened in the course of a banquet. But let us first relate what had preceded it. The vast dining-hall, made to hold a very great number of guests, possessed a harmony of design which dissembled the real proportions. Arcades went all round it. Between each of them a sphinx in porphyry reared above its strong paws the face of a woman wearing the head-dress of the Egyptians. Never before had those faces looked on such a blaze of light ! It sprang from everywhere, from torches held in great arms of brass, from lofty candelabra spread out in sheaves, from silver tripods shooting up giant flames which seemed to take wings.

Round the table covered with plate a hundred guests were standing wonderstruck. On the appearance of the royal couple musicians struck up a chant which had just been composed, wherein the praises of Antony alternated with those of Cleopatra. As they beheld them—he, superb and Olympian in his tunic spangled with stars ; she, gracefully playing with her scarf and armlets—how could all those present fail to join in those dithyrambic strophes ?

A sofa supported by four crouching griffins occupied the end of the table ; Antony and Cleopatra took their places side by side and signed to the guests to spread themselves out on their couches which formed a semi-circle. If it be enchanting to pass one's life among the refinements of luxury, to eat delicate fare, to drink wines which seem like liquid gold, tickling the palate with their rich flavoured warmth, nothing is more irksome than to talk of them for long.

Cleopatra was too much alive to the inadequacy of these enjoyments not to be always trying to mingle

with them some artistic attraction, some rare delicacy, to lighten their tedium. The diversion that evening consisted of dances, or rather of emblematic figures composed by the celebrated Sicilian actor Clitias. A group of twenty-four girls made their appearance representing different hours of the day and night—some were black like the night, others were of the hue of dawn, of midday, or of the shades of twilight. Each of them, in slow or quick movements, called up an image of the pleasures which may be experienced on earth in its eternal round. When one had finished, the next succeeded, and the *finale* came with a light kiss on the feet of the Queen.

Although these charming diversions met with extraordinary success, and Antony was so delighted that they had to repeat them three times over, Cleopatra remained in thought, her eyebrows contracted. Already she was asking herself what new distraction could be arranged for the following evening. Was it not necessary that each night should offer to her beloved guest some sight which he had not yet applauded?

Suddenly a light flashed across her face. Once again she had succeeded.

"I invite thee to a feast which shall surpass all that thine eyes have yet looked upon," she said. And when Antony with his boisterous laugh denied that such a thing could be possible, she answered:

"The supper alone will cost ten million sesterces."

Antony continued to rally her. It was not the first time that his well-beloved had made extravagant propositions.

"Let us wager!" she said.

He accepted.

"If I lose what must I give thee?"

She did not reflect long. The words were on her lips in a moment.

"A kingdom."

He proposed Phœnicia. Had his libations affected

Antony's brain? Had he already reached the stage of only considering Roman provinces as a stake in his pleasures?

Phœnicia! The most enviable portion of the coast—Tyre, Gebel, Sidon, Beryte, all those thriving cities, with their purple, their carpets, their furniture wrought in cedar of Lebanon, all their wealth! At first Cleopatra could not overcome her surprise. She had thought he was only joking. But Antony's face was serious; she understood that his offer was made in earnest. Their fingers touched in sign of the pledge.

The news of this wager was soon spread abroad. In the town people talked of nothing else but the mysterious project in store when Bruchium would see its splendours surpassed. Sensible people shrugged their shoulders; ten million sesterces for one repast! Could it be possible? Others asked themselves what fresh extravagance to burden the finances of the state was the Queen going to invent?

On the given date the same guests arrived in the Hall of Arcades. They were filled with curiosity for they looked for some novel display. What were they invited to see? What was to be the spectacle to justify the enormous expense which had been announced? Their surprise on entering was extreme for no change in the scene had been made. The same scintillating brilliancy, the same sumptuous decoration of flowers and plate, an exquisite *menu*—everything the same as they had been accustomed to see where perfection and profusion were such that it did not seem possible to surpass them.

The sovereigns made their entry with the customary ceremonial. The Queen was very simply dressed so that her jewels only should draw attention. It was well known that she had a passion for them and that the unrivalled treasures of the Lagides had been constantly still further enriched by her. Everywhere her choice had been bestowed on what was rarest. During her sojourn in Rome the Etruscan artificers had worked for

her alone, carrying out designs according to her ideas. But her preference was for pearls. Some had been brought from the Persian Gulf, Ceylon, and Malaya, and every time a shipmaster set out for the Indies she would charge him to bring her back what was most rare, no matter what the cost.

It was thus that every shape, every tint of pearl, could be admired on her neck, her arms, or fastened to her girdle. On this night she wore but two. But what pearls! Their size and the purity of their outline defied all comparison. Hung by an invisible little chain they played around her ears like drops of fairy dew on the edge of petals. The marvel was that nature could have produced them with identical perfections, and that on two occasions the hand of man had discovered them. To have accomplished this however the lapse of centuries had been required; for the first had been sent from Ophir by Alexander to his mother Olympias, and the other had recently been discovered on the shores of Malay, after much costly seeking. Was it the reflection of the light, or the proximity of the roses with which her youthful brow was girt that gave them that wonderful tint? Or was it, as some allege, that pearls remain living creatures still, showing emotion when their fate is at stake? Never before had the gems suspended to the ears of Cleopatra appeared more superbly alight with the colours of the rainbow.

The banquet pursued its sumptuous course but seemed a little flat, as when some special feature has been expected which has not eventuated. They had come to the dessert and still no response had been made to the expectation of those present. Many faces showed disappointment. Antony alone was jovial. He already considered himself as having won the wager and made merry over the price he had agreed to pay. His jesting became somewhat trivial.

"By Bacchus, thy supper is not worth the ten million sesterces thou didst promise!" And twisting round his

supple body he leaned towards Cleopatra and mockingly gave expression to his impatience.

"Not so fast!" she said. "Thou hast not yet won."

Summoning at last the cup-bearer, who held himself ever in readiness for her orders, she signed to him to fill the goblet before her. This golden goblet, a veritable marvel, was reputed to have belonged to Pericles. In any case it had been wrought by one of the best artists of his time. A troop of archers enriched its circumference, and the body of the Chimæra, which formed the handle, placed into the hands of the drinker the most nobly-fashioned figure of a woman it was possible to conceive.

At that instant everyone watched attentively. It was felt that the moment had come, that the celebrated goblet was about to take part in some strange exhibition. Every movement of Cleopatra was closely observed. What was she going to do? What magic was she about to perform, for some amazing act might always be looked for at her hands.

Turning towards Antony while raising the goblet to her lips, she said with an expression half jesting, half solemn:

"Look well. When I shall have drunk this, my wager will be won." And at the same moment her hand detached one of the two pearls, letting it fall to the bottom of the foaming cup where it dissolved.

A host of exclamations broke forth such as some irreparable catastrophe occasions.

Having drained the cup Cleopatra made ready for a second holocaust.

Antony seized her wrist.

"Spare thy jewels," he implored, "I acknowledge myself beaten."

The Queen still hesitated.

"Phœnicia is thine," he added. "What further use to make a double sacrifice?"

It is related that in memory of that evening Cleopatra always wore between her breasts the pearl no longer mated. In any case it was from there that Octavius took it after her death. It was shaped like a tear, an enormous tear, as if in it had been condensed all those tears that had trickled from those beautiful closed eyes. Deeming that no woman, even Livia, was worthy of such a jewel, or fearing perhaps it might bring misfortune, the conqueror of Actium bore it off and made an offering of it to Venus. "And thus the half of one of those suppers at Alexandria hath become to-day the adornment of a goddess!" was the sorrowful comment of Pliny as he meditated one day in the temple.

Had Antony forgotten that he was a Triumvir? Did he not remember that the life of every man, particularly that of the head of a State, is a keen and constant struggle? It was not quite that. But without asking himself if the moment was propitious, without heeding the far from reassuring news announcing trouble in Italy, and incursions, under the traitor Labienus, by the Parthians into Asia Minor, he gave himself a respite. That some day or other he would of necessity be obliged to take the head of his troops he did not, and could not, have doubted. Does the life of a conqueror roll away in the arms of a woman? Meanwhile, constrained and enfolded like some prey, he was really and truly a captive, and the bonds with which he allowed himself to be held were too delicious for him to make the least effort to break them. When at times he came to himself it was enough for him to say: "I shall know quite well how to free myself when I must."

In order, however, to give the illusion of a duty which justified his prolonged presence in Alexandria, he set himself to perform diverse acts of government, the principal being the revision of the treaty of alliance existing between the Republic and Cleopatra. All its clauses were regulated in accordance with her will, and

at her urgent solicitation, he put his seal on it by recognising Cæsarion as the legitimate son of Cæsar and heir presumptive to the throne of Egypt. The *entente* between the two countries being now assured he ordered his finest and best equipped legions to come, and had them stationed at intervals along the Nile. This deployment of troops was not long in imposing order, and it now became clear to all that the Queen was powerfully supported, and that there was nothing else to be done but to obey. Moreover, in order to firmly establish her authority over these troops, to enable her to dispose of them as if they were her own, the sparrow-hawk of the Lagides was graven on their bucklers side by side with the Roman eagle. And on the field of Mars, the Roman helmet on her head and her bosom sheathed beneath the cuirass, Cleopatra passed them in review with Antony riding at her side.

Easier now in her mind since the stabilising of her throne, and having no other fear but the departure of the lover who had become indispensable to her life, she set about to use every means in her power to keep him from anxieties abroad. Remaining always by his side, and ever watchful of those who came near him, she arranged their daily programme in such a way as not to leave a moment unoccupied. Their life became a veritable whirlwind. Sometimes they would take long rides along the sandy roads, where the sense of space intoxicated them and their horses returned worn out, and sometimes they would hunt the eland and gazelle, or would risk their lives in expeditions after the wild stag. The danger lifted up their spirits and rendered still more enchanting those hours spent afterwards in their apartments. But little by little their feelings became blunted, as is the case with those who seek their happiness in external excitement apart from that secret paradise which flourishes only in the depths of the heart. The need to be always having fresh and keener sensations drove them to experiences which were to degrade them.

Athirst for pleasure they mingled with the jovial bands who at nightfall thronged the gardens of the Ceramicus. At first secretly, later on openly recognised.

Many goddesses had their temples at Alexandria, but none received more fervent and more assiduous worship than the graceful Aphrodite. Under the names of Urania, Astarte, Acidalia, Callypige and Cypria, every citizen and every young woman acknowledged her power and brought her offerings. In the midst of a wood of sycamores, in front of that celebrated wall where kisses were openly trafficked, over fifteen hundred courtesans had their dwellings, not counting the school where a hundred young girls were completing their education under the direction of experienced matrons who initiated them in the thousand ways in which to make themselves pleasing to the goddess. Taken away with the consent of their parents, or bought outright, these young girls came from the most distant countries, for the variety of female types to be met there was one of the principal attractions of the Ceramicus. Some were white-skinned, with bright eyes and silky hair, others dark or fresh complexioned. All were not of equal beauty according to the canon which Greek art has spread throughout the world, but all had rounded arms and firm bosoms, and all knew that they must smile and perfume their bodies.

What were these royal lovers about, these two beings of the highest rank who, without leaving the palace could have satisfied every noble and costly impulse, what were this erring pair seeking among that lewd crowd beneath the flickering shades of the branches? Let us be determined to ignore it. Since they have taken pains to disguise their faces let us not recognise them, and if we happen to meet them on the doorstep of some house lighted by two red lanterns let us be indulgent.

Unhappily this mad conduct was not to remain unknown. Although Antony put on a mask and Cleopatra

shrouded herself from head to foot in a dark veil, more than one passer-by (perhaps it was the tall and handsome Eros, Antony's faithful follower who always accompanied them, who was first recognised) suspected their presence in a place where they should not have been. It was soon a mystery no longer in consequence of a deplorable brawl in which they found themselves mixed up.

It happened in the quarter of Rhakotis, that huge kennel where cut-throats held full sway amid scenes of low debauchery. Evil haunts abounded in this quarter, and alleys rang with barbarous music to the sound of which ignoble scenes took place in low cabarets. It was here! Yes, here, that the representative of Rome and the daughter of twenty kings liked to spend their nights! Antony's manners became brutal and coarse. Cleopatra made herself in tune with him. With cynical jokes they wrangled together, calling each other opprobrious names in imitation of those surrounding them. Nothing pleased Antony more than to see the Queen of Egypt sitting at a table until morning amid foaming tankards, and hearing her bewitching little mouth, made only for the music of the gods, trilling obscene couplets, or telling lewd stories and rapping out words which he had heard in former days when on guard at the Esquiline Gate, or in the slums of the Suburra.

Now it happened that a quarrel broke out one night between some sailors over a girl who was displaying herself on the stage. In a moment there was a tremendous uproar. Shouts and insults were hurled about, violent blows were exchanged, and the flash of knives cleft the air. Cleopatra felt herself fainting. Her throat became parched, a cold perspiration stood out on her temples. Would she have strength to regain the entrance? Eros was only just in time to seize hold of her, and in his strong arms he carried her out into the open air. She revived, but by mischance her veil became displaced, and the girlish face, which on other occasions they had seen crowned with the *Pschent* was

now visible, pale and discomposed by fear. A sad contrast indeed ! A lesson from which we may learn that pleasure when ceaselessly indulged in leads to ruin ! What is more significant than the case of those lovers, those spoilt favourites of destiny ? As far as fortune availed they had attained the highest peaks ; they could soar aloft and look down on the ugly things of the world at their feet and say to themselves : " We are in a safe haven." But no, they were insatiable. With everything that was beautiful at their disposal, their greediness craved for what was most base as well. The wheel of sensations must revolve without ceasing. At the slightest slowing down they again put it in motion, and it dragged them down to depths from which they arose irremediably soiled.

This scandal, however, was not to have grave consequences, at least for the moment. The hour of Nemesis had not yet struck. Well satisfied with the government which the Queen had set on a firm basis, and with the prosperity of the revenue, the Alexandrines did not attach much importance to what they called her jovial pranks. Besides, depraved likewise as they were themselves, by what code of morality, under what laws could they blame the conduct of Cleopatra ? A kind of sympathy and fellow-feeling between herself and her people seems rather to have resulted. Since she, whom they had deemed inaccessible, had descended to the level of a woman of the town, what indulgence might they not look for on her part ? In some of the men who for long had worshipped her from afar an eagerness for a closer bond was inspired. " Any other woman would wear down desire," wrote one of her admirers ; " there is nothing like this with Cleopatra. The more one sees her, the more doth her grace inspire one afresh. Vice, debauchery, cruelty—everything is transformed by her, everything taketh on an unutterable charm. Even in the midst of her depravities the priests themselves know but to bless her."

As for Antony, the inhabitants of Alexandria at once adopted him. Inasmuch as the grave bearing and cold demeanour of Cæsar had abashed them, the jovial personality of the Triumvir made their proverbial frivolity feel at ease. Whereas the one, whether mounted or in his litter, would be always distant, and never mixed with them, the other would be amused at sights in the streets and would often pause before the shop-windows, buying something to take back to Cleopatra for which he would pay generously. He would even chat with humble citizens, and did not mind cracking jokes and even emptying beakers in their company. Above all he had shown great tact in not appearing in public in his warlike garb, which would have recalled to their minds the hated power of Rome. He had substituted an Egyptian guard in place of the lictors. The coat of mail, and the helmet surmounted with its silver crest, had given place to silken robes and an Oriental head-dress. This flattering attention to the larger part of the population had rallied to his side much approbation. "He keepeth for Rome his ominous bearing," they were in the habit of saying when they remembered the part he had played at the time of the proscriptions, "but towards us his countenance is always friendly."

His boon companions, who shared in his disorderly life without any scruples, thought still less of making any complaints against him. Like Antony himself they were under the bewitching charm of Cleopatra. They loved and admired her, and in exchange for her favours they bore with good grace the sarcasms her mocking humour sometimes inflicted. For a smile from her what would they not have endured? In order to please and amuse her some of them even came to losing all dignity. Paterculus relates that on one festive evening Munatius Plancus, a former Consul, and several members of Antony's suite, crowned with reeds and the tails of fishes fastened to their bare loins, mimicked the dance of Glaucus.

May we not ask ourselves whether that evening the lords of the world, those proud Romans who had so greatly despised her, had not become the slaves of the Queen of Egypt?

CHAPTER VI

ANTONY'S WIVES

It was however hardly a time for frolics, disguises, and pageantry. Threats of danger were rumbling on all sides. Not only were the incursions of the Parthians upon Roman territory becoming more and more audacious, but Italy was full of revolutionary outbreaks. Another of those crises which had been rending the peninsula for more than a century was now endangering its very existence. These outbreaks, resulting from the perpetual discontent of every class, were due at the present time to a combination of grievances. On the one hand, the landed proprietors who had been despoiled of their property claimed the right to take possession again of their lands, and on the other hand, the veterans to whom these lands had been promised demanded the carrying out of these promises. Reinforced by soldiers who were still under arms but had not drawn their pay regularly, the veterans were in the majority, and formed the stronger party. Properly speaking they were the only organised force still remaining to the Republic. The man who could satisfy their legitimate demands and impose his own will would be master of the situation. With the great number of legions at his disposal and the power he had over them, Antony was the man marked out for this.

Failing him, Octavius was the next. His mean

personality, however, and his reputation for cowardice and cruelty, rendered his task more difficult. He made some attempts at conciliation, one of which took place at Gabies whither the proprietors and representatives of the army had repaired. A commission was set up to discuss the rights of each case. It might have been perhaps possible to have come to an understanding, for all sides wished it, but two individuals who had taken good care not to attend the meeting and were bent on war, had recruited enough support to render it inevitable. These were Fulvia, the wife of Antony, and his brother Lucius.

For Antony was married—very much so—if we may be allowed the expression. The woman he had wedded on the morrow of Pharsalia had been previously the wife of the demagogue Clodius, and after his tragic death she had married Curio, tribune of the people. Owing to her connection with these turbulent revolutionaries she had acquired the habit of mixing herself up in the affairs of the State. In this school her mind had become emancipated and masculine; she had lost all the gentleness of her sex without acquiring those virtues which enable women to do without it. Notwithstanding, although she was by no means beautiful, Fulvia had succeeded in capturing the great general, perhaps even in making herself loved. She had doubtless succeeded because it was the destiny of this great disturber of hearts to win the love of women and then to give himself up to their will. Far-seeing and domineering, she had quickly divined the position she might make for herself with such a magnificent instrument as Antony, so long as a firm hand directed him. Her ascendancy became so great that at one time it was truly said that he was merely a sword hung at Fulvia's belt.

To this obnoxious influence must be attributed the greater part of the sanguinary acts by which the name of Mark Antony is soiled. Three hundred deserters from Brundisium were executed at the instigation of this

Megaera, and their punishment caused her such keen delight that she needs must be present, and so close did she approach that the blood of these unfortunate men spattered her robe. It was she who also stirred up hatred in the mind of her husband against Cicero.

We know in his Philippics with what vehemence he attacked the man who was, to his republican views, the incarnation of despotism. He had called Antony "a soldier with no political genius, with no loftiness of mind, lacking all real distinction and abandoned to debauchery." Divining too the influence under which Antony was acting he had fearlessly denounced Fulvia. "Is that man free?" he asked the citizens whom he was adjuring to leave the demagogic party, "is that man free who is at the command of a woman? Upon whom she imposes her laws, prescribes, orders, forbids, according to her own good pleasure?"

Fulvia never forgave him. When accounts were settled up she found deep in her own venomous heart the arrow which Cicero had planted there, and returned it to him winged with death. To have her detractor assassinated was not even enough; she must needs sully his remains. When they brought to Antony the head of the great orator she drew from her hair a long golden pin and pierced through that tongue which had defended justice from one end of the world to the other.

We may well suppose that such a woman was not one to allow herself to be despoiled without some stir. From the moment she knew whose skilled hands had taken possession of her husband rage gnawed at her heart. How could she get him back again? Entreaties and threats in turn followed the road to Bruchium. But we have seen to what a paradise of indifference to all which did not concern his fair mistress Antony had withdrawn himself. Determined to hear nothing which might cause him to leave her, more often than not, he did not even unroll his letters.

Fulvia however was capable of having recourse to

the worst forms of vengeance. An expedient that seemed to her worth considering was the unloosing of civil war. In league with her brother-in-law Lucius, an intriguer who also nourished dreams of crushing Octavius and of establishing his own family in the highest position, she said to herself: "If he shall see thousands of men dying for his cause Antony will be compelled to leave the bed of Cleopatra."

Instigated by these two accomplices several landed-proprietors stirred up the agricultural population to revolt. There were quarrels and fights. A large number of towns declared against Octavius. Even in Rome itself blood was shed. The statues of the Triumvirs were broken. Lucius profited by these disorders to assume, in the name of his brother Antony, the rôle of defender of Republican ideas. He announced that Antony himself was of the opinion that the Triumvirate had lasted long enough, that he was ready to annul their powers and would be content to be Consul. These assurances gained for him numerous partisans among men of law and order who were anxious for the return of lawful rule. At such a crisis as this was it possible that Antony would not return and take the lead?

But delegates who had been sent to Alexandria with the mission of bringing back the general did not even get so far as seeing him. Cleopatra had given orders to pack them off as quickly as possible failing which she would have them put in prison.

On learning of this outrage Fulvia conceived the plan (for she stopped at no crime) of uniting herself with her husband's enemies. She offered to Octavius a pact of alliance, and proposed as a guarantee of her sincerity that he should marry Clodia, her daughter by Clodius. She was a charming young girl and was not yet seventeen. Octavius showed no distaste for her but he nevertheless refused. That practical man was not willing at any price to burden his career with such a mother-in-law as Fulvia.

And the war went on.

Whether it was owing to the small esteem in which he held his adversary—"that raw scoundrel" as he contemptuously called him—or whether in very truth Cleopatra had taken possession of his mind to such a degree as to make him ignore the risks he was running, Antony still persisted in staying away. At the end of her resources, his exasperated wife, who every day felt the danger growing, returned to the idea of negotiating with him. Difficult as this was with a man she could not get hold of, it offered the only chance of rescuing Antony from his inertia. But all depended on finding an ambassador who would be received and listened to.

After conferring with Lucius, their choice fell on Ahenobarbus, the oldest companion in arms of the Triumvir and one of his best generals; the friend who had shared all his campaigns and who on the day of triumph had always effaced himself before his chief. He at least could not be driven away.

When this Roman of the old stock, who had scarcely ever been absent from camp life and whose cuirass seemed to fit close to his body like skin to the bones, penetrated the luxurious, silken and perfumed interior of Bruchium; when he saw Antony clad in a long embroidered robe with a scimitar at his belt and wearing a turban on which blazed an enormous carbuncle; when he beheld him thus he had a shock! Was this the man of Philippi, was this the comrade he had not seen since the days when covered with skins of wild beasts they had suffered together without complaint the rigours of a Macedonian winter?

"Mark Antony!" was all he could say as though that great name comprised all the astonishment, all the reproaches, with which his soul was overflowing.

Antony was far from being insensible. When he learnt what his wife and brother had taken in hand his face became flushed. No doubt he understood the element of personal interest and profit which they hoped

to derive from the zeal they had placed at his service ; but for all that, there still remained the fact that Fulvia was offering a rare example of conjugal attachment, and Lucius was a man of ability. At that moment he had a sincere wish to rejoin them.

"Then do not hesitate," concluded Ahenobarbus with the simplicity of one accustomed to harmonise his sentiments with action. "Those who are fighting for thee are shut up in the citadel of Perugia ; they are running the risk of dying of hunger. Gather thy legions together and march to their rescue."

But matters were not so simple as the brave soldier thought. Cleopatra was to enlighten him. Unversed as he was in matters of sentiment, when he saw her and listened to her charming voice he understood that Antony was no longer his own master, but that he belonged entirely to this siren. The great thing was to convince her.

With single-minded frankness he disclosed the whole position. If Lucius and Fulvia were left to their own resources Octavius would very probably gain the upper hand, and Antony would lose the opportunity of weakening an adversary who was not yet formidable, but might, sooner or later, become so.

Cleopatra had too much perspicacity not to feel the full force of his arguments. No one had more concern for Antony's advancement, nor more cause to look with fear on the success of Cæsar's nephew, which would be a challenge to Cæsarion's inheritance. Doubtless if Lucius had been acting alone she would have urged Antony to join hands with him ; she would have said : "Go forth and fight for our united glory and the extension of our power." But to give him back his liberty, to permit her cherished lover to set foot again on the soil of Italy would be to give him back to Fulvia, and although ugly, vulgar, incompatible by temperament, and more suited to haranguing soldiers than to arousing passion, this Bellona nevertheless caused her some uneasiness.

She knew her to be ambitious, and was well aware of her despotic rule over Antony. Would it be prudent under these circumstances to deliver such a precious hostage into her hands, even for a few days? After weighing all these considerations in her mind, love, that tyrant which has no need for aught but itself, carried the day. Perugia, Rome, all Italy might be set ablaze, but she would not relax her hold over Antony.

On the day before Ahenobarbus, disappointed and dissatisfied, was to embark on his return, an incident occurred which very nearly brought the whole matter to an issue. Antony's spirits were gloomy. In the depths of his heart he heard the groaning of his conscience, a conscience which was not aware of itself but whose appeals from time to time came to disturb his tranquillity. In addition to this his old comrade, without saying anything more, nevertheless regarded him with looks heavy with reproach.

Cleopatra asked herself what distraction she could invent to withdraw him on this last day from the pleadings of Ahenobarbus.

She proposed a fishing party.

Both accepted, and boats took them to Lake Mareotis along the canal which unites it with the port of Eunoste. Reeds rustled on either side of them, and the sky was so brilliant above the still waters in which the red buildings on the bank were reflected that it seemed as though some fire were devouring them. The boats stopped at the end of the lake, where in the quiet and undisturbed waters they watched the undulating motion of the carp.

Antony had cast his line several times without catching anything. This want of success, especially in front of Ahenobarbus who was watching him pensively with his arms crossed, made him still more gloomy.

At last, out of temper and determined to succeed, or at least to have the appearance of doing so, he summoned Eros and spoke to him apart.

His instructions were to fasten on to his master's

hook a fish caught by the others, one of the largest, and adroitly make it glide under the water in such a way that no one should suspect the trick.

But the Queen was not long taken in. She also knew one or two tricks, and her inventive mind soon contrived another which, unknown to Eros, a diver was ordered to carry out.

Antony had resumed his jovial air. He no longer drew out his line without a big carp hanging to it. Compliments surrounded him and all expressed astonishment at his prowess. But all of a sudden, just when he was bringing in an enormous catch, a burst of laughter rang out. The fish this time was one of those preserved in pickle and used as bait. Now any other day he would have been the first to break out into loud guffaws of laughter, for he was fond of practical jokes and had even made them the fashion, but the presence of the Roman general made him feel embarrassed and they returned in silence.

Deeming the circumstances favourable for a last attempt, Ahenobarbus waited until everyone had reached their apartments, and then went in search of Antony.

"Dost thou not feel that thy place is not here?" he said. "These childish pastimes to which thou hast given thyself up are at best only suited to women and eunuchs. But thou! A man like unto thee! Warrior, Chief of the State, one of the three props of the Republic, there are cities, nay continents, for thy taking!"

With his habitual gesture in moments of perplexity Antony rested his elbow on his knee, and with his chin buried in the palm of his right hand he looked at his friend. How was he to reply? The flame, not yet extinct, revived and pointed out to him the glorious goal to which they had once been marching together.

"I would gladly follow thee!" he said.

"What obstacle preventeth thee?"

"Dost thou ask!"

"Is love then so strong that, once its captive, a man

may no longer be himself ? " cried out the old warrior in astonishment.

Their conversation continued. Antony willingly lent himself to it. The trifling wound his vanity had sustained rendered him sensitive. The distant future began to outline itself. Whither would this amorous life of a Satrap lead him ?

" Thou art right ! " he said, seizing the hand of his friend. " To-morrow I will leave with thee." And with firm tread he took his way to Cleopatra's chamber.

Reclining on a deep bed, she was awaiting her lover as usual, though perhaps with more impatience to-night. During supper he had seemed morose. What ailed him ? Could he have been vexed at the trick she had played ?

Seated by her side Charmion was reassuring her. " No, Antony understood practical jokes ; was he not constantly inventing fresh ones himself ? "

The gentle rhythmic murmur of the sea was coming through the wide open bay windows. Through the curtain over the entrance Antony caught these words : " Thinkest thou that he will always love me ? "

With his heart full of emotion he pondered : " How can I bring pain to the most loving of women ? "

When he was quite close and was looking at her without speaking, she asked : " What ails thee ? Upon what art thou thinking ? "

He hesitated before replying. It seemed so terrible to tell her. Then suddenly, as one distrustful of his courage, he muttered very quickly : " There is no doubt that I must go."

She gazed at him, scarcely believing her ears, for his words surpassed anything she might have feared.

" Leave me ? Thou speakest thus to frighten me because I fooled thee."

" Child ! Do such things as that matter ? " he said " I owe my duty to those who are fighting my cause."

This reply struck at the heart of Cleopatra.

"Thou hast a mind to rejoin thy wife!"

Grave as the moment was Antony could not restrain a laugh.

"Thou! Jealous of Fulvia!"

After all why should she not have been? The campaign which his deserted wife was waging was not that of a woman entirely indifferent. Fair or ugly, are not passionate women, with their outbursts, their tears, their sacrificial knife which they are ever ready to raise, are they not always dangerous rivals? Cleopatra understood them well; better than anyone else she knew what a heart on fire is capable of doing in order to keep or win back a lover. The character of Antony moreover was not of a reassuring nature. Far from her would he not find in that other, that revolutionary Muse, the support which his unstable will unconsciously sought for in women?

And all these tortures of her troubled soul she summed up in the following words, the effect of which it was not difficult to foresee:

"Dost thou wish then that I die?" And as though this were the beginning of the end she sank back pale and weeping on her pillows.

Was anything further needed to imperil the resolve which had taken birth at such cost? Antony was already vacillating. Leaning over the beloved face on which so often he had seen the pink flush of joy, he thought only of how to repair the mischief he had just caused. His departure was not imminent. He would charge Ahenobarbus to take the necessary steps and later on . . . if it were necessary . . .

Cleopatra revived.

Still weak, and drawing his beloved head on to her breast, she said: "In case of necessity it is I who will beg thee depart. Do *I* not desire thy welfare and thy glory as much as, even more than thou dost thyself? But listen to me. Thy brother and thy wife are fools; they only act in their own interests. Let them extricate

themselves without thy help from the embarrassments in which they have placed themselves."

Antony asked nothing better than to believe her. The night passed with no further question of separation.

Other nights of joy succeeded. The lovers recovered their self-possession. Passion reared around them a rampart behind the shelter of which they willingly ignored the war, dangers, menaces—in fact everything. On realising the risks they both were running a kind of exaltation took hold of their senses. Little did it matter if the world fell in ruins provided they remained together.

However, the gods, in their gracious favour towards Antony, agreed this time to save him. Just when Perugia had come to the end of all supplies of food and was on the point of surrender, and when the army raised by his brother and wife was beginning to lose heart at the failure of Antony in whom it placed full confidence, it happened that Fulvia suddenly fell ill and died. She had been the soul of the resistance. Deprived of this living force, Lucius, who had not in himself the incentives to enable a man to uphold a struggle against all and sundry, put up his sword in its sheath. And thus by a most unexpected event Antony's absence, which looked as if it must entail the loss of everything, was on the contrary to effect a general settlement. Having taken no part in the war he could not be held responsible for it. Hence it became easy for him to make his peace with Octavius. It was sufficient for him to disavow the policy of his relatives. To bring this about he would only have to go and effect the negotiations in person.

Fulvia being now dead, Cleopatra had no further reason to oppose the temporary absence of Antony, or even to be specially alarmed on his account. She had already borne him a child, and another was expected. They had agreed to celebrate their nuptials in the spring, and to legitimise her child, as had been done in the case of Cæsar's. As though however that cunning monster,

who gnaws at the vitals of too great happiness, had made himself heard from afar, all apprehension had not departed from her mind. What was she afraid of? Of whom? She could not have told anyone. The idea came to her to consult the oracles. Perhaps from them she might learn the mysterious danger against which her whole being was in a state of distrust.

Just as the long-bearded augurs sought for the secrets of the future in the holy books, in observing the flight of birds, or the entrails of victims; just as in Claros, Cumæ and Tibur they had their Sibyls, and Delphi its Pythia who fasted for three days before mounting upon the tripod whereon the prophetic frenzy seized her, Alexandria too owned its celebrated college of astrologers. Not only did these famous men consecrate their nights to the study of the firmament and to acquainting themselves with the laws that govern it, but they gave the names to each of the constellations by which we know them to-day, and their science claimed to interrogate and receive answers from them. Each celestial body was to them a divinity under whose influence we are born and live, and just as their light radiated brightly in times of happiness, so was it clouded over at the approach of ill.

In the dead of night, and accompanied by a single slave, Cleopatra climbed in silence the one hundred and twenty steps which led to the highest terrace.

Sisogenes, the great drawer of horoscopes, was awaiting her, for he had been previously advised of her visit. With arms extended and his face bowed to the dust, he made three salutations. "What had the daughter of Amon-Râ to ask of him, he the lowest of mankind?"

She declared her wish to know the destiny of Antony. In a few days the Triumvir would have regained Latin territory. What fate awaited him there? Had she anything to fear for him?

Clad in yellow, with a string of little bells hanging from his sleeves and high bonnet which rattled with each

movement, Sisogenes, before answering, began to trace signs in the sand with which the terrace was sprinkled ; then, with his back turned, his hands open in the attitude of ecstasy, he fathomed the vault of stars. Myriads of golden points studded the deep blue heavens and their reflection in the sea had the appearance of a rain of diamonds.

On a sudden, seizing hold of his wand, Sisogenes indicated a point in the sky. He had discovered the star under which Antony was born.

"There! Pure and brilliant it approacheth the zenith!" he said.

But soon the star appeared to be eclipsed. It had just encountered another star. A moment later, the latter disappeared, and the first resumed its magnificent brilliancy.

Much impressed by this phenomenon Cleopatra became even more so on learning that it was the star of Octavius which had caused that of Antony to grow pale. There could be no doubt that the genius of each was contrary the one to the other, and that Antony must be on his guard against his colleague under all circumstances, and must hold himself aloof from him.

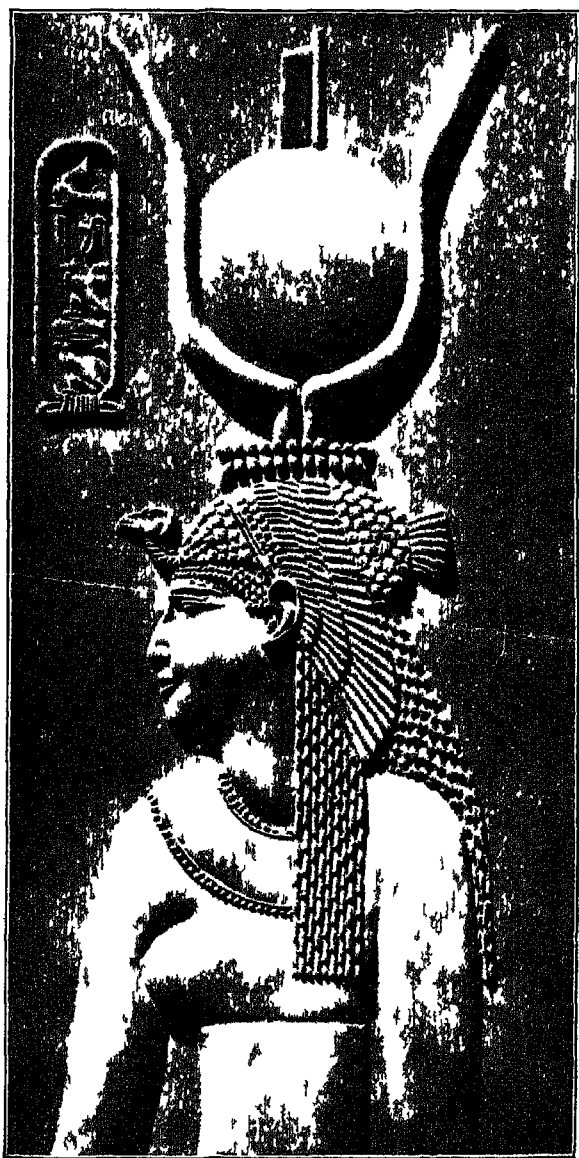
When she returned with the horoscope the Triumvir was all the more astonished because his own sleep had been troubled by a dream. He thought he was marching over ground strewn with flowers. All of a sudden he had the impression of something resisting, a barrier set up across his road. After a terrible struggle he had suddenly awakened covered with perspiration such as is produced when one has escaped some disaster.

Antony would not have been a man of his times and country if he had despised warnings such as these. There was no man of Latin race who was not susceptible to the most trivial omens. A sneeze, a tingling of the ears, had each their significance. A fall, or the little finger becoming numb, were held to be of unfavourable import. If a man on going out encountered a flight of

crows he would be wise to return and give up for that day any undertaking. But if bees welcomed him in the sunny air he could attempt anything, for luck would be with him.

How could minds habituated to take into account such small things fail to attach importance to signs from heaven? If Antony's departure could have been deferred, it would certainly have been, for both he and Cleopatra were very unhappy in their inner selves. More clearly even than dreams a voice was warning them that the best of their romance was over. Would they ever again find a time when they could give themselves up entirely to love? No! They felt it. That heedlessness, which is the first youth of passion, was ended. Duties of every kind would keep them far away from each other, perhaps for long. Antony owed his duty to his rank, to his responsibilities. To make his peace with Octavius—if it came to pass—would only solve one of the complications that had recently arisen. There would then have to follow the subjugation of the Parthians, the re-establishment of order in Asia Minor, etc. Although since resuming his cuirass the general had already recovered himself, and did not mind hearing the call of the bugles, his great boyish laugh was now silenced, and the wine-cup before him remained half emptied. And Cleopatra was suffering still more, for was it not she who had the most to fear from this separation? Her eyes gazed mournfully at her lover, and despite her own efforts and his constant promises to be back before the end of the year, anguish pressed at her heart.

When the day came, although her grief almost drew cries from her, she insisted on accompanying him to the ship. The wind was blowing freshly from the East. The sea with its surging billows looked as though it was covered with long white wings—the wings which were to bear away her happiness. Ah! If only she could have kept him! But have our poor desires ever held back



Photo]

[Guiragossian

Cleopatra, from a bas-relief in the Temple
at Denderah

fate, even for an hour? The galley already had hoisted her sails; the three rows of oarsmen had taken their places on the benches, and fifty arms, black as ebony, were making ready to strike the water. Leaning over the extremity of the balustrade running along the Heptastadium, Cleopatra murmured those tender farewells which her hand waved to Antony. And just as he was rounding the mole, with a voice choked with tears she threw him one last entreaty: "Be thou mindful of the two stars!"

If Antony had still cherished that passion for revenge which had inflamed him on the morrow of the Ides of March, or that hatred which was later on to hurl him too late against the adversary who had become too powerful, there is no doubt he would have got the better of Octavius and the fate of the world would have been changed. But the time he had spent at Alexandria had deteriorated his natural instincts, and the combative force which had once formed the wild beauty of his nature, had lost its freshness. Far from approaching Italy with the fierce impetuosity necessary to conquer her, he arrived with his mind saturated with Egyptian magic and the one desire to conclude peace as soon as possible in order to recover his freedom.

Octavius also, but from very different motives, wished for a friendly adjustment of the trouble which Antony's family had caused him. Other and graver complications were demanding his attention. At the head of several legions who had remained faithful to the glorious memory of his father, Sextus Pompeius had landed in Sardinia and from there was engaged in waging piracy against the Latin coasts so as to reduce them almost to famine. If Antony with the sixteen thousand legions he had kept in Macedonia and the fleet of swift ships which the Rhodians had built him were to enter into an alliance with this new antagonist, Octavius would be lost

It has always been said that fear renders men cowardly and cruel. At the present juncture it drove Octavius to make cruel reprisals upon those who had been vanquished at Perugia, and before Antony to appear like a lamb. In reality, Octavius had never felt at ease with this Herculean colleague whose handsome appearance, proud bearing, and good spirits secretly envenomed him. Although as regards his own morals he had no reason to be envious of him, his feeble constitution despaired of ever attaining that ease of manner which made Antony almost irresistible. Inasmuch too as he felt himself to be little liked by the soldiers he noticed with bitterness their devotion to Antony, a hardened warrior like themselves, under whom they even preferred to serve without pay than to be well paid to fight against him. To avoid the appearance of being left in the lurch and seeing Antony crowned with success, he had immediately concluded that it was better to have him for a friend than an enemy, and even now he said to himself: "Although it should cost me the hundred million sesterces filched by him from Cæsar's inheritance I would make him my ally."

On both sides therefore they were ready to negotiate. Their friends too were no less anxious than the protagonists themselves, for after so many revolutions, agitations and bloodshed, everybody had an immense craving for peace. Antony's friends were awaiting him at Brundisium. They soon persuaded him to reject the revolutionary offers made by Sextus Pompeius and to come to an understanding with Octavius. The latter offered to hand over to him Cyrenaica, which was to be taken from the portion that had been given to Lepidus, in exchange for Cisalpine Gaul, which had fallen to Antony at the first division.

Anxious to start for Asia, whither his real interests called him, Antony chose as his representative Asinius Pollio whose intelligence and tact qualified him to cope with Mæcenas, the delegate of Octavius, and he entrusted

him with plenary powers. It would be time enough on his return to affix his signature to the agreement.

The haste he showed to carry his standards into the East is easily explained, for Cleopatra had taught him to consider those provinces as their common domain, that fertile region as destined to supplant the old impoverished Europe, and to constitute the seat of a world-wide empire which together they had determined to found. To drive out the Parthians, and to extort from them the money required to satisfy the soldiers on whose support his authority depended, was what concerned Antony far more than to dispute with his colleagues over some shreds of territory. And now, as on each occasion when he had come to himself and had recovered his real qualities as a leader, he showed himself full of decision, activity and courage. At one stroke he was seen taking Palestine from Pacoros and re-establishing Herod, punishing the cities which had massacred their garrisons, forcing Labienus to take flight, and freeing captive Syria by breaking down the gates of Lamanos. These victories brought back his unfettered youth, and refashioned his soul to that energetic temper which almost always succeeded his period of indolence.

It was upon this that his friends had counted. By persuading him to put on his cuirass again, while they occupied themselves in laying the foundations of a new Triumvirate, they reckoned that they would thereby gain time, for his friends had their own plans in view. Believing in the efficacy of a marriage as a guarantee of the treaty, and as a means of preventing Antony from returning to his mistress, they had intrigued to make him marry the sister of Octavius. None of them were ignorant of the fact that though death had removed Fulvia, the principal obstacle to this project had not disappeared with her. They knew, alas, that the courtesan from the Nile—as they called her with contemptuous loathing—was still seductive and alluring with all the prestige of her royal splendour. But absence

for the time being at any rate rendered her less formidable, and it was from this absence that they were determined to profit. What comparison could there be between the presence of his actual self in the arms of a woman distraught with grief and the effect on him of her letters, even though they were written in tears? On the other hand the design of uniting two Triumvirs by the tie of blood and through the instrumentality of the gentlest and comeliest of women conciliated interests that were too grave not to have some chance of being listened to. The whole matter lay in adroitly manœuvring without precipitation, and in choosing the propitious moment.

What moment could be more so than when Antony returned? The sun that day was brilliantly shining upon Rome, not with the metallic glare which makes the scenery of the Levant stand out so sharply defined, but rarefied and delicate, accompanied by beautiful clouds through which the light played. The ancient city was nobly and picturesquely outlined between her flower-covered hills, and the low-roofed houses, clustered close together round the temples, brought back a familiar scene.

From the moment that Antony set foot on those paved streets full of pious memories, and from the bank of the river looked again on the place where he had once collected from the spent funeral pyre the ashes of Cæsar, and heard the mighty voice of the forum acclaiming him, his heart swelled with an emotion he had not experienced for a long time. Whatever joys had thrilled him elsewhere no other place on earth could have procured him the unspeakable joy he felt at being home again. Rome was the soil of his fathers. The air he breathed excited and braced him up as though he were on a mountain-top. The blood coursed through his veins in such abundance and richness that it was as though on a sudden the concentrated tide of his race had flowed in.

Such being his disposition the appearance of the Roman ideal as presented by Octavia could not fail to

affect him favourably. Without being of striking beauty her modest and charming mien exactly realised all that a Latin brought up on traditional lines looked for in the guardian of his hearth. Her countenance was oval, slightly elongated, and of that pure type which the artists of the Renaissance were to rediscover in immortalising their Madonnas. Her pensive eyes were shaded by long eye-lashes, and her thick hair, rolled in regular coils round her head, wore the appearance of a crown. Anyone in search of a contrast could not have found a more striking one than that offered by this creature of grace and gentleness and the implacable Fulvia, except by comparing the passionate and triumphant seductiveness of Cleopatra, thrilling one at times like some festal music but ever armed with claws and ready to burst forth into flame, with that transparent delicacy, that mingling of light and shade that could be felt enwrapping the sister of Octavius.

Octavia had already been married. Blessed by love, tranquillity and fruitfulness, her short union with Marcellus, for whom she still wore the robes of mourning, was a token of what life with her would mean. It was upon her intelligence and fundamental goodness that Antony's friends, as well as those of Octavius, had counted as a means to construct an arch of peace to join the two pillars of the world. Her domestic virtues would have sufficed to assure its solidity, but the young Roman woman possessed other and higher attributes to add ornament and distinction to the edifice. At a time when vileness was rampant, when selfish fears breathed counsels of cowardice into the souls of men, when treachery glided into the very heart of family life, she had had many opportunities of showing what manner of woman she was—generous to a degree, compassionate, and ever ready to help. Availing herself of the tender ascendancy which she exercised over her brother, she had many times intervened in order to snatch away his victims.

It was to her influence that her friend Tullia owed the life of Thoranius, the husband whom she adored. He was awaiting the hour of execution in an underground dungeon after his condemnation a month previously. All Tullia's prayers had been in vain and the hour could not be further delayed. What was she to do? How could she save the unhappy man? Public opinion disapproved of his condemnation, but degraded as it was how could it make itself felt? Octavia took a bold step. One evening when the Emperor was going to the theatre she made ready a stratagem. When he arrived in his box in purple robes and attended by lictors, a curtain was drawn aside and there appeared, by the side of a young woman in tears, a spectre in chains! From every part of the theatre arose cries of "Pardon! Pardon!" What each individual would have feared to beg of himself, the crowd demanded. The future Augustus was too weak to go against a popular wish. He lifted up his forefinger, her cause was gained.

Octavia's presence produced the soothing effect of shade upon the impassioned nature of Antony. Never since his boyhood had he met anyone so fresh and tranquillising. The thought of establishing his home with her inspired him with something like remorse. Had he only met her sooner he would without doubt have been another man. But to-day how could he restore his life, how raise himself to the level of some pure dream? Although he had been spoilt by a false appearance of liberty he said to himself at times: "Who can tell? Possibly it may not be too late?" But alas! at other moments the image of the Egyptian woman asserted itself in his memory, and forbade him to entertain any happiness apart from her, so disordered had his mind become, and so filled was he with misgivings and the alluring fascination exercised over him by Cleopatra.

Octavia was not at all ignorant of Antony's past. Desirous as he was to associate her in his political ambitions, her brother, who loved her, did not conceal the

risks which a marriage with the lover of Cleopatra entailed. He could not commend the man whose faults from the very antithesis of their two characters he hated, and whose undeniable good qualities he misunderstood. Upright and prudent as the young woman was she might have been turned from so perilous an adventure, but beneath her reserve she concealed a brave heart. Her youth desired warmth in her quiet life. From their very first interview she had felt irresistibly drawn towards Antony, who was to be the cause of her death. Looking at him and admiring his broad shoulders and his bright happy laugh, she told herself that such a man could not be faithless. If his former life had been disordered it was because impetuous women had never wound around his neck those bonds of tenderness by which one may lead even a lion. How touching is the error which leads virtue to believe in its own power ! What danger lurks in the attraction exercised upon frail hearts by strong and sensual men, drawing them to love those for whom passion is the law of life !

Octavia's mistake however was not to be revealed all at once. The early days of their marriage were happy owing to that wholehearted contentment to which Antony had been a stranger, and from its very novelty was a joy to him. He was like the traveller who has seen many countries, has been torn by many a bramble and whose wounded feet are well content to find rest at last. From a fallen paradise he had lighted upon innocent and untried love, and for a time he delighted in this new revelation. But how are we to describe the bliss of the young wife ? The peace of cycles that had achieved their course had descended upon her spirit. She thought she had discovered that enchanting fountain which perfumes the soul with the scent of flowers in spring. With her heart full of joy she sought with eagerness to minister to the least wishes of her husband. She even showed a kind of genius in divining them and anticipated his wants before he had time to move a hand.

When taking a walk one day he admired the Palace built by Pompey on the Appian Way, and expressed his regret that such a fine building remained empty ; she at once obtained from her brother the removal of the sequestration, and offered it to Antony full of rare treasures. Although her tastes so far had remained simple she thought that no framework was too spacious or too rich to enclose so privileged a pair as themselves. How could this Omphale who was burning with fidelity foresee that soon this palace would be to Antony like a prison ? This resulted however before the first year of their married life had rolled away.

Though seasoned with tenderness and devotion the atmosphere of family life could not for long content a man who considered his heart to be large enough to embrace an infinity of delights. Full of force and imagination, the descendant of Hercules felt constrained when living under the traditional system. Magnificent as Rome had appeared on the day of his triumph, it had now fallen back to its real proportions, and after the extensive and brilliant display of Alexandria with its glittering cupolas, obelisks and *pylons* to which his eyes had become accustomed, Rome appeared to him little better now than a provincial town. He could ill put up with its austere morals, its petty bickerings and prejudices. And what meant all this preaching against luxury and pleasure incessantly inculcated by morose philosophers ? In a word, Antony was growing weary of it. Ah ! Where were those songs of joy whose imagery on golden wings had lulled him so deliciously for two years ?

The proximity too of Octavius caused him unbearable discomfort. While those who had laboured for their reconciliation rejoiced at seeing them apparently on good terms, issuing their decrees, reviewing the troops, or joining in the evening at table as brothers, they themselves secretly felt the stirrings of a hatred which was destined to increase. Between two men equal in rank whom a divided power brought into perpetual

contact such was inevitable. Whether in connection with matters of State, or in the most trivial details of their private life, everything became an occasion of strife. Whenever the emotional and easily excited population of Rome showed any preference for one of the two Triumvirs, or approval of some measure attributed to the one, the demon of rivalry rose up. Even in games which occasionally the brothers-in-law played together they ran the risk of an altercation for neither of them could bear to be the loser. Often the dice favoured Antony, and Octavius would allege that they were clogged.

One evening they offered their guests an exhibition of cock-fighting, and wagers were laid as was customary. It happened that three times running the cock belonging to Octavius had the advantage. Antony grew pale with anger. Unable at last to contain himself any longer he abruptly left the *atrium*, and Octavia's entreaties, that evening at any rate, were powerless to bring him back.

Insignificant in themselves, the daily renewal of these occasions of irritation became like attacks of mosquitoes which end by poisoning the whole surface of the skin. Their relations, which even at a distance would not have been cordial, became positively embittered. It was from Antony's side nevertheless that the marks of antipathy were the more vehement. Rightly persuaded perhaps that the first place should be allowed to him, he could not avoid being irritated by the protocol which stood in his way and even gave in certain circumstances the precedence to Octavius. The words of the Egyptian oracle kept on recurring to his memory from the most trivial causes: "Keep thou away from thy rival; wheresoever fate shall bring ye together thy star shall be eclipsed by his. Only in the East shall the star of thy destiny shine in all its brilliancy."

Even if he could have forgotten those words, in which he saw the fortunes of his life wavering to and fro, he would have been reminded of them by the seers,

astrologers and all that clique by whom he was surrounded through the secret agency of Cleopatra. The idea of escape began to haunt him. His only thought now was to leave Rome and to regain the soil where his predominance, indispensable to his own powerful organisation, should be established. To be master! To command! To be the one to whom everyone should submit! To have the wide-open space before him and to be able to tell himself: "No one can dispute the smallest little portion." What a dream! What a wish exalting his pride and straining his eager will!

A crowning success alone could disturb the equilibrium and give to one of the Triumvirs the upper hand. "I will be that man," said Antony to himself. The vast design of removing to the East the centre of his political and military activity, and of there founding an immense empire over which he should be the undisputed sovereign, impressed itself more firmly than ever on his mind. This was to revive the chimera of Cæsar which, at a time when all problems might be solved with the aid of money, would pour rich treasures of gold into his hands.

But could he bestride this chimera, could he ride it to that glorious end? In order to attain this he would first have to free himself of the Parthians, the dangerous neighbours who were infesting the frontiers, and then establish himself beyond the Euphrates and make himself master of Persia. The plans for this bold campaign were in existence; they had been drawn up to the most minute detail by the conqueror of the Gauls. Antony, to whom these plans had been confided during the last few days, had only to obtain possession of them. The only change to effect was as regards the city which was to supplant Rome. Alexandria was the place clearly indicated by Cæsar who, on the eve of his great enterprise, only lived for Cleopatra. This same Alexandria had also shone before the eyes of Antony as the future capital when he was with Cleopatra, and to her too who had her own plans in view it had seemed good. But to-day, in

the house ruled over by the virtuous Octavia, the very name of Egypt could not be mentioned. He suggested Athens.

Like all women who are really in love Octavia must have wished that her husband should not leave her. To lean upon him was enough for her tender heart. When she learned of the ambitious projects of Antony it seemed to her that happiness was withdrawing for ever from their hearth, and that no more would she slake her thirst save in the waters of disenchantment. She was however too wise not to admit that the law of great lives is activity, and that to love a born conqueror was to vow oneself to gloomy solitude. Her brother too, who had recently married Livia and was much in love with that seductive woman, had he not just departed to fight against the pirates under Sextus, likewise urged by the spur of supremacy? She therefore accepted his departure as a submissive wife but only under the promise that immediately after the birth of the child she was expecting Antony would authorise her to rejoin him in Greece.

A sensation of deliverance, comparable to a ship when she has cast loose her moorings, made Antony's heart flutter when after getting clear of the mole he watched the port of Ostia growing faint in the distance. To be free! He had at last regained his liberty! In vain he tried to restrain the joy within him. In vain did he reproach himself when he thought of the gracious virtues of his wife, the love with which she had loaded him and the very sincere affection which still attached him to her. How can one help the heart beating when one is happy? And Antony was enraptured at no longer feeling the fetters around him. To get back into the thick of things, to start on great adventures, and to labour for the ascendancy of his own destiny, was like awakening from a long torpor.

Athens afforded him a unique starting-point for his

first pleasing experience—that of receiving the key to power in acts of submission and homage without having to share them with another. The Hellenes had preserved brilliant recollections of his personality. They admired his physical beauty, his military genius, and his vitality. Although a warrior they knew him to be a friend of art and respectful of their traditions. The pilgrimage he had once made to the summit of the Acropolis, on foot and wearing the pallium, had won him all hearts. Whatever his subsequent excesses might have been—and their echo had certainly reached them—their opinion remained steadfast that Antony was a demi-god. This title, with its accompanying emblems, they lavished upon him with a thousand honours. A *thyrsus* wrapped round with leaves was offered to him by a chorus of Corybantes, and festivals in his honour were multiplied as at the *Panathenæa*. This delirium of adulation knew not where to stop, and became ridiculous by offering to the new Bacchus the hand of the virgin Athene who stood before the Parthenon in her helmet, holding the golden lance of Olympian fray.

Antony, laughing in his sleeve, affected to take the matter seriously.

“I accept,” he said, “on condition that my betrothed shall bring me as dowry a million *drachmæ*.”

The flatterers were caught in their own trap. They had to carry it out. The lesson was a hard one, however, and the High Priest, whose duty it became to provide this sum from the resources of the temple, could not withhold this rejoinder :

“Zeus exacted no such treasure to become the lover of thy mother Semele.”

In the midst of these extravagant espousals Octavia seems to have been somewhat forgotten. She did not however take it in bad part. To share him with a goddess had nothing very alarming about it. She only claimed on her side to come and take part in this parody. The Athenians were no fools. They welcomed her

effusively and feigned to honour in her the living image of Minerva. Festivals, amusements, and banquets were given at which Antony had only to call to mind those of Alexandria in order to add splendour to them. Everything was proceeding therefore in the best possible way. He had recovered his life as an Oriental sovereign, and clothed in purple, shod with golden sandals, and his forehead bound by a fillet, he employed his leisure in presiding at athletic contests—races, leaping, boxing, hurling the lance and discus. Octavia by his side distributed the rewards, and gracious, united, with no thought for the morrow, they took their pleasure in this pleasing royalty.

Spring however had returned. Antony had seen the branches of the sacred laurel again grow green, and had drunk the waters of the Fountain of Clepsidra. He consulted the oracles and was promised a triumph. He therefore made speed to place himself at the head of the troops which were awaiting him in Epirus under the command of Ventidius. The beginning of the campaign was astounding. An uninterrupted train of successes by the advanced guard enabled him to believe that the invasion of Persia would only be a military procession. This success was all the more gratifying because at the very same time Octavius had suffered defeat on the coast of Sicily.

Those were exultant and great days for Antony—days in which a man might say to himself: “The world and its kingdoms are coming into my hands.” But this illusion made him neglect to reply to the messages sent him by his brother-in-law. Now that he was at a distance Antony rejoiced in knowing that Octavius was in difficulties, and had no mind to send to his aid the fine Rhodian fleet he was calling for.

Octavia was far from sharing these sentiments. If love had thrown her ardently into the arms of Antony it had not led her to renounce her brother. Her loyalty alone, if not her affection, would not permit her to forget

that one of the first conditions of her marriage had been that she should uphold the interests of both Triumvirs. Up till now she had not had occasion to intervene save in slight disagreements which had always ended without any real harm being done. But to-day the case was different. If as yet she had not completely realised it how could she still conceal from herself that the supreme position of the two men was at stake, that they envied and hated each other, that her gentle life ran a very strong risk of being crushed between these rival forces. Ah ! Why had the gods placed her in that cruel position, like corn between two mill-stones ? But whatever happened this was not the time to lament.

After putting Antiochus to flight Antony returned from Syria drunk with victory. His wife thereupon considered the moment favourable for coming to an understanding. Accompanied by Ahenobarbus, who also deplored the ill-feeling existing between the two Trumvirs and feared the worst consequences from it, she went to meet him at Ephesus. Their affectionate relations on meeting again gave her hope that she had not lost all influence with the returning conqueror. Tenderly but firmly, as her conscience dictated, she reproached him for having allowed his ships to remain idle in port rather than despatch them to the help of her brother. Let alone the compact signed between them, did he not realise that if ships at the moment were necessary to Octavius, reinforcements might be required by him when he ventured into the depths of Asia ? To refuse the one might be to deprive himself of the other. Why could they not help each other ?

The language of reason, however, could have little influence upon Antony who believed himself to be invincible. Deeming a rupture inevitable he would have provoked it forthwith, but Octavia's tears moved him. He had always been weak where women were concerned. After having always allowed himself to be dominated by those who excited him to violence it was the least he could

do to listen now to this angel of peace, even if it were only for once in his lifetime.

"Go, negotiate with Octavius," he said. "But forget not, before all else, that thou art the wife of Antony."

More difficulties than she could have foreseen awaited her on the part of her brother. Like all hesitating and timid characters, he was subject to accesses of fury, causing him to decide suddenly on measures from which he subsequently found it very difficult to extricate himself. Exasperated by the evident ill-will of Antony he said to himself that an ally of this kind was as dangerous as an enemy, and that he must learn to do without him until the supreme test came. Without delay, therefore, and seconded by Agrippa, who was beginning to manifest his great knowledge on naval questions, he undertook the construction of a fleet. The port of Tarentum began to resound with noisy clamour. Well-paid carpenters and caulkers were already working and singing by day and night. The din of axe and hammer rose up, and the regular beat on the anvil was mingled with the shouts of porters and fish vendors.

In the midst of this feverish activity Octavia rejoined her brother. As she approached she saw him surrounded by engineers to whom he was constantly giving orders. Contrary to his usual custom he accorded her a welcome which gave evidence of distrust rather than of pleasure. What was she doing here?

Thinking this would settle everything she said :

"I am only a few days in advance of the fleet which Antony is well pleased to place at thy disposal."

"Too late!" replied Octavius in an acid tone. "In three months' time mine own shall have taken to the high seas."

This was a rude beginning. It annihilated the hopes which Octavia had founded upon her brother's embarrassing position. But she was not the woman to allow herself to be beaten. The mission she had under-

taken redoubled her courage and determination. She would accomplish it were it life or death. Brave to make excuses for her husband, just as she had bravely taken her brother's part against him, she pleaded her case. If Antony had been backward it was because he had been surrounded by countless difficulties and had not been warned in time. Immediately he had been apprised by her he had said: "I will go to his aid." And they would soon witness his coming.

The brow of Octavius, marked from his youth by a line joining his dark eyebrows, was more difficult to smooth than that of Antony. The will to dominate common to both of them enclosed Octavius as in an impenetrable coat of armour. Feeling that she would bruise herself in vain by speaking of her husband, concerning whom she had only feeble arguments to advance, Octavia began to plead for herself.

"If thine anger shall prevail," she said, looking at her brother with her eyes full of tears, "if sword and spear shall cross, no one knoweth to whom shall be the victory. One thing alone is certain, that I myself, the wife or the sister of the vanquished, shall weep for the rest of my days."

Was he touched by this cry from a woman's heart so humbly uttered? Or in the background of his thoughts did he fear that Antony would make alliance with Sextus? It remains however that urged alike by his good counsellors Agrippa and Mæcenæ, he withdrew his refusal and consented to come to an understanding.

Antony was waiting in the port of Piræus. As soon as Ahenobarbus had brought him back the answer he set out with the two hundred and twenty triremes which were his pride and his strength. Their arrival before Tarentum made a fine show. When Octavius saw them covering the sea far and wide, with their sails still new and unsoiled, and the silvery foam whipped up by the oarsmen, he felt that however numerous and powerful were the ships he was now building, this fleet, still quite

new, well rigged and well armed, would not be without its use. And could Antony foresee that those self-same craft, those speedy, light, and trim Liburnian vessels would one day turn against him and decide the victory of Actium? In his eagerness to undertake the famous campaign from which he looked to gain the empire of the world, he thought only of those six legions of Gauls made up of good archers, hardened foot-soldiers, and rude cavalry habituated to the Alpine passes; and these he meant to obtain in exchange for a portion of the fleet.

Negotiations however were lengthy and difficult, for naturally both parties were desirous of getting the most they could while granting the least. Without the olive branch borne to and fro from one ship to the other by the tender dove, would they ever have come to an agreement? While Agrippa and Mæcenas on the one side, and Ahenobarbus and Pollio on the other, were discussing, transacting, and snatching one by one from each other either soldiers or ships, which formed the counters in this terrible bargaining, a plaintive refrain broke forth.

"What? War! Still more war!" wailed Octavia. "From being the happiest of women would ye make me the most unfortunate?" And regularly every morning she kindled as many lights on the sacred candelabrum in the temple of Vesta as her heart contained prayers.

And granting her touching appeals both as a sister and a devoted wife the goddess appeased the hearts of the two adversaries. After well weighing the advantages to be derived, or they thought they would derive, from the concessions made, each of them put on magnanimous airs. Neither were willing, they pretended, to be the cause of distress to one who formed so tender a link between them. At her hands they waived their hostility. A new pact was concluded which prolonged the Triumvirate for five years. And on the evening of that happy day, at the feast of family reconciliation, seated between those two rivals whom her tenderness had tamed, well

might the new Sabina, had not modesty restrained her, raising the golden goblet first in honour of the one and then of the other have said: "I have preserved the peace of the world."

CHAPTER VII

THE MARRIAGE AT ANTIOCH

LEANING her elbow on the parapet from which could be heard the slow beat of the waves against the dyke, Cleopatra watched the vessel bearing away her lover fade away in the distance. After the top of the masts had disappeared beneath the horizon she dropped her hand which for long had been waving her handkerchief. A terrible contraction tightened her throat. Her tears began to fall. Though the sea was calm and its shades of green and mauve made it like some tissue of woven silk, all that it presented to Cleopatra was an immense gulf separating her from Antony. Turning towards Charmion she breathed forth her sorrow.

"What will my life be like now? No more to see him from whom poured forth my whole happiness! To be bereft of his gaze, to hear no more that laugh which gladdened every hour! In what weariness am I to languish!"

The best confidant is one who associates herself fully with the griefs entrusted to her. Much as she had from the first deplored the *liaison* of her dear mistress with Antony, and feared that the handsome warrior would lead her into disastrous adventures, Charmion feigned sympathy. Her voice gave a true echo to Cleopatra's confidences. No doubt the Triumvir's absence would leave a great void; everything at Bruchium would be saddened, but his absence was to be a short one. Had

he not at the moment of weighing anchor again reiterated his promise to return before the end of the year ?

Cleopatra did not doubt his speedy return. Her hopes were robust, like a beautiful tree in full leaf. But summer was only just beginning. How tedious the days would be !

Talking thus together they remounted the terraces while two negro boys, holding above their heads ivory-handled palms, shaded them from the sun. The Queen stopped frequently as they strolled along, for these enchanted spots, which she had so often paced on the arm of Antony, were full of memories. She approached some ibis, motionless like pink patches on the green lawn, and, with one foot folded under their body seeming to be lost in profound reflection. The scent of carnations made her draw forth a sigh. Every evening before going indoors Antony would choose one in fullest bloom, and after pressing his lips upon it would fasten it to her breast saying : "I give thee my soul," and during those hours when they could not interchange caresses, that flower still remained there like the perfumed breath from his own mouth.

Nothing makes us feel the absence of anyone more cruelly than the continuity of things we have seen together.

"Antony, Antony !" her lonely heart kept calling.

"Thou dost love him too much, Madam. No man is worth . . ."

"How well one may see, Charmion, that nought hath troubled the untouched surface of thy heart ! Dost thou then believe that love limiteth itself by the merit of those who inspire it ? In that case, how could I have ever loved one better than Cæsar ? Nevertheless, and thou knowest it, Antony is the first who hath caused my whole being to vibrate."

They came nigh to the fountain from which the water poured forth smooth and compact like crystal and then fell foaming on to the surface of the basin. At the

sound of the water Cleopatra's anguish redoubled, for she saw in it an image of time passing away and carrying life's happiness with it. Would she ever again see days like the past, which were lost for ever like the water that had flowed away yesterday?

Anxious to remove her from the sight of things bringing from their very charm distress in their wake, Charmion gently drew her away.

"Come and rest thyself, Madam; to-morrow will doubtless bring thee more courage."

Cleopatra allowed herself to be undressed, swallowed a draught of nepenthe reputed to induce slumber, and closing her eyes said:

"Yea, to sleep! Ah, if I might but slumber until the day that he shall return!"

She had to live however the four, five, six months, perhaps even more, during which her lover would be absent. And Cleopatra was not the woman to waste them in fruitless lamentation. Leaving to Dido her ashes and robes of mourning, she continued her sumptuous life amid her royal duties. Many matters called for her attention which she had neglected during the time wholly given up to Antony, when she had spent herself only to charm, to amuse, and retain him. She first went into those which were most pressing, and with that mastery she brought to bear upon everything, applied effective remedies. Those who had deemed her frivolous were surprised to see her remonstrating with her ministers and conducting the finances of the State more wisely than they themselves. She was no less skilful in reorganising her army on the model of the legions left behind, in increasing her fleet and in improving the administration. Truly performing her part as a sovereign she bettered the lot of her people. She protected them from famine by a system of irrigation, bringing from a distance the fertilising flood of the Nile; she drove back the Nabathean tribes who were menacing the frontiers of Arabia; and, in a word, made people feel that though a

woman, the ruler of Egypt was in no wise inferior to a mighty king.

Like all the Lagides she had a taste for architecture. Accompanied by architects, engineers and artists, she went from city to city supervising the proper upkeep of the old temples. Those of Edfou, Hermonthis and Coptos were put into repair. That of Denderat, which she enlarged, still bears her image graven on stone cartouches. She restored the library at Alexandria and began the Cæsareum, some remains of which have been excavated and reveal her taste for Hellenic art. From her reign dates the erection of the last obelisk, that which goes by the name of Cleopatra's Needle, twenty centuries later to be transported to the banks of the Thames, to wear a garb of mourning on its rose-coloured sides from the soot of the British capital.

This activity however did not chase away the great anxiety gnawing at her heart. In the midst of ceremonies, banquets and journeys, she kept on asking herself the same question: "What hath become of Antony? Where is he? Hath he forgotten me?"

Separation from those we love can only be borne patiently if letters link us together and if the written lines still bear the warm whisper of spoken words. At the beginning, hardly ten days would pass without some galley coming from Brundisium and bringing long missives. Tender at first, and full of that sadness which comes of separation, they were the true echo of those sent to him by Cleopatra. "When I awake, when I go to sleep, thy presence is ever with me," wrote Antony. "I seek thee everywhere and feel thee near me."

The state of his public affairs was no less satisfactory. The Triumvir announced that in order to accomplish a more speedy return he was confiding them to the care of the able Pollio while he was himself going to Syria and Palestine to re-establish his authority which had been somewhat compromised by his long absence.

Since she could not have him under her own

immediate eye, no place of residence for her lover could be better suited to Cleopatra's wishes than that of Asia Minor. It was there that they had met again. In that country, so like her own in climate, customs, dress, and its easy means of communication, would he not seem much nearer to her? In Italy, on the contrary, everything gave her cause for apprehension.

By one of those feminine instincts which are seldom deceived, she had a presentiment that some event, some danger, some influence bringing suffering in its train might suddenly start up from Rome. Octavius she did not know, but since he had come forward as the heir to Cæsar was he not from that very fact the rival and enemy of her little Cæsarion? Everything therefore connected with him must be held suspect. Ah, if only Antony, too much inclined to be easily influenced and too unsuspicious by nature, would only take heed to be on his guard!

Cleopatra's activities were for the time being interrupted by the birth of twins, to whom she gave the high-sounding names of Helios and Selene. The occasion seemed propitious for reminding Antony of the question of their marriage they had planned together, which would secure the future of these little ones.

He sent her back his joyful congratulations, telling her he was anxious to legitimise them at the earliest possible moment. In proof of his assurances a messenger handed to the young mother a golden chased coffer containing two pearls of most perfect roundness. "My lips have covered them with kisses," he wrote, "as they likewise long to cover thy fair breasts moulded to their resemblance."

These pledges soothed the mind of Cleopatra with gentle restfulness. She loved and was loved. This assurance gave her great joy and was like a lighted beacon before her.

His letters however were beginning to be more scarce. But who could wonder at that? The Triumvir had left

the coast; he was away up country occupied with military affairs and had little leisure for correspondence. Besides, far away as he was from the temptations of any city, what cause had even a heart the most ready to take alarm to fear on his account?

Towards the middle of autumn a Roman galley arriving from Asia confirmed her confidence. This time it brought neither the roll sealed at both ends with the red seal which the Queen was always able to distinguish in the hands of the bearer at a distance, nor a present, but a messenger, who craved an audience with her on the part of Mark Antony. Her heart felt suffocating with emotion. Her eyes were going to behold one who had recently been face to face with her lover.

"How many days is it since thou hast left the Emperor?" she asked.

"Twenty."

"Where was he then?"

"At Samosata, on the furthest borders of Comagene."

And her questions came rapidly:

"How was he looking? Sad? Gay? What did he tell thee? What is the message he hath charged thee with?"

Menecrates was a freedman in whom Antony's confidence had engendered the art of making himself pleasant. On every occasion he was able to be the faithful interpreter of his volatile master.

"When I presented myself before the Emperor to receive his orders he was neither sad nor gay. His countenance showed only that divine energy which is seen on the face of the god Mars. Far and near the country presented a warlike spectacle. Naught could be seen but chariots, mules, soldiers marching, and steel gleaming in the sun. With one hand he held the bridle of the fiery charger he was mounting, and with the other he seized hold of the pommel of his saddle. 'By the sacred geese which wing their flight above the Capitol go and report what thou hast seen—Mark Antony dashing

forth to conquer kingdoms which he will shortly lay at the feet of the Queen of Egypt," were his words.

Cleopatra was once more fully reassured. Her lover was fighting for her, he was preparing their future; victory was leaving its track everywhere behind him. Soon he would be returning, so glorious, so powerful, that nothing, nobody, would be able to oppose the carrying out of their magnificent projects.

The winter mists however were spreading over the sea and navigation had ceased. It was now more than three months since any news had come. No matter how assured one might have been, confidence is a fabric which has ever need to be renewed. Cleopatra grew depressed. A disquieting melancholy began to steal over her. She kept on thinking: "A few more days and the latest date for his return will have arrived. If he should not have come by then . . . !"

Unable to understand the cause of his long-continued silence she surpassed herself in inventing grievous reasons, such as poisoned arrows, accidents, shipwrecks, filling her mind with mournful visions. Not for a moment could she endure to be alone. The presence of Charmion or Iras became indispensable. She questioned them without ceasing and gave vent to her anguish.

"The end of the year draweth nigh. Wherefore, Charmion, doth he not announce his return?"

"Doubtless, Madam, he would take thee by surprise."

And hours went by during which the Athenian girl, seated at her feet and looking up with her beautiful violet-coloured eyes, endeavoured to reassure her.

But as the days followed on the Queen became more and more difficult to convince. Some obscure menace seemed to be coming from afar, on which at first she had not pause to reflect.

"Supposing he hath ceased to love me," she said one day to Iras, seizing her hand as though in sudden fright. "If another woman hath supplanted me!"

"After having known Cleopatra," replied the Persian with assurance, "what other woman could possess the heart of Antony?"

These vague forebodings however were soon to become a cruel reality. From travellers coming from Rome it was learnt that the general had returned thither and had made his peace with Octavius. It was known too what had been the pledge.

The tragic scene in which Cleopatra learned of the marriage of her lover has been drawn in such a manner by Shakespeare, whose genius has made to live again all the phases of its violence of grief and tears, that no one after him can add anything to it. From the silence, the impressive silence, which reigned around her, the Queen came to understand at last that some misfortune had happened. They tried to conceal it from her. No one had the courage to speak. Then it must be something terrible? And at once her imagination leapt to the worst.

"Is he dead? Hath death chilled the most ardent of mortals?"

"No, Madam, Antony liveth; he is well," Charmion assured her.

The Queen breathed again. But at once her mind conceived another disaster. Had Antony abandoned her? Her scared eyes asked the question.

No one replied. Their eyes fell to the ground. Charmion stammered forth some incoherent words. She did not know. . . .

"And thou, Iras?"

"There is no certain knowledge . . ."

"I *will* know!" commanded Cleopatra in a tone that brooked no resistance.

Search was made for the man who had brought the news. He was a merchant who had come to Alexandria on business affairs. He had been gossiping after the manner of those who come from afar. He knew nothing as to why they required him at the palace.

"What knowest thou? Speak!"

The appearance of the Queen at that moment was formidable. Nevertheless, not feeling any sense of responsibility, the man related what was the subject of general conversation at Rome.

Frantic and gasping for breath, the Queen repeated after him :

"Thou . . . sayest . . . that . . . Antony . . . is . . . married ?"

And on being assured by him that the marriage with Octavia had been celebrated with great pomp she fell into a kind of delirium. All her dignity and pride collapsed. She was beside herself. Her eyes sought among those around her for someone on whom to wreak her vengeance, someone who should expiate the horrible evil that had befallen her. Those who knew her best had drawn away. It was the unfortunate fellow, whose only crime had been to speak the truth, who was to feel the full force of her fury. He was loaded with abuse and overwhelmed with blows and threats. We have here a representation of what an unbridled nature accustomed to undisputed authority is capable when for the first time it finds itself confronted by catastrophe. What ! *She* to suffer and be powerless to prevent her torture ! Had the laws of the universe changed ?

The first moments were frightful. After this violent outbreak, which she could not withstand, she wept bitterly, and then fell into a swoon. The servants ran about and filled the palace with lamentations, and physicians hastened as to one who had been sorely wounded.

"I pray thee, O Queen," implored Charmion, "afford not thine enemies the joy of seeing thee give way ! Let them not see the extent of thy woe."

Iras too surrounded her with tender ministrations.

"Madam, Madam, arouse thyself !"

After pouring her out a few drops of a soothing cordial she began to breathe more freely.

Little by little Cleopatra grew calmer. Her desolation

was no less acute, but she succeeded in mastering it. To her frenzied transports succeeded the stupor of one who has seen an abyss open before her.

"*He! . . . He!*" she kept on repeating. "He in whom I had placed my whole trust! He who said to me: "My well beloved, thou art the life of my life!"

Then her thoughts turned to the woman who had stolen away her happiness. The sister of Octavius! Octavia! What kind of a woman was she? The desire to know the truth in all its details rose within her with the same violence that had just now driven her to stifle the accursed words.

The traveller had disappeared. Taking advantage of the confusion caused by the swooning of the Queen he had made his escape. By dint of much seeking he was at last discovered at the bottom of the hold of a ship. By hiding there he had counted upon gaining the sea unnoticed. He had given up the business that had brought him to Alexandria, feeling only too happy if he could escape with his life. Great was his terror when he knew that they were seeking him, and he required many assurances to persuade him that no harm was intended. Fear at any rate had made a prudent man of him. He learnt that to the great one must speak not the truth, but what they wish one to tell them. A second examination was to prove him as cautious as an old courtier.

The Queen too had undergone a transformation. An intense and painful curiosity dominated every other feeling within her. She was like one groping her way in the dark.

"Tell me of Octavia," she said with a gentleness under which the command to be obeyed could be clearly discerned. "Since thou hast seen her tell me if she be fair? Hath she sparkling eyes? What is the colour of her complexion? And particularly, the colour of her hair?"

But she might put as many questions as she pleased; she would never again hear the truth from the man whose ears were still ringing with the abuse that had been

heaped upon him, and whose body still smarted with the blows he had received. According to his account Octavia was ugly, she had lost the sight of her eyes, her hair was scanty and grey, and was arranged severely in plaits around her head.

"And her age?" pursued Cleopatra on the tip-toe of her anxiety, for however seductive may be the abandoned mistress the bugbear most to be feared in her eyes is the countenance of a young maiden, whose spotless virginity the husband has plucked in the perfumed garden of happiness.

On this point at any rate the truth had nothing to exasperate her. When she heard that Octavia was a widow who already had two children, when she had been positively assured that her rival was possessed of no beauty, or charm, or anything that could inspire a voluptuous attachment, she had a momentary respite. Her anger indeed had not left her, nor her bitter rancour against the woman who had undermined and betrayed her, but she began to understand the important public interests which had influenced this marriage, that it was merely an act of policy.

But in spite of this conviction, which she endeavoured to instil into her mind, the cruel shock of her grief was so great during those first few days that she thought she would die. A jealousy, from which she had considered herself immune when she believed its object was not worthy of it, began to invade her heart. Was it true, she asked herself, that Octavia was ugly, and without any charm? Was it certain that her gross and forbidding form could not awaken love? The assurance that this was so, coming as it did from a mere traveller, could not give her any peace. Besides, can a woman ever tell? Antony had really had some kind of sentiment towards the monstrous Fulvia; why should he not be susceptible towards this new wife, who it was said was at least gentle and virtuous? And every day the poison insinuated itself deeper into her soul.

At last it caused her such unbearable torment that she vowed to deliver herself from it. By a great effort she persuaded herself that she no longer loved Antony, that she had never loved him, and that in consequence she was entirely indifferent to the fact that he was the husband of another. In order to give herself full proof of this detachment, and to others a striking demonstration of her feelings, she renewed, in the company of the young men surrounding her, those excesses which have been described in a former chapter. No longer restrained by the burning ties of passion, she passed from one pleasure to another with inconceivable cynicism. Every day brought her some fresh degradation; she became intoxicated with a frenzy for evil, but from none did she obtain the alleviation her fevered soul was seeking.

No matter how she tried to drive it out, to soil and trample it underfoot, like the fragments of some idol in which one has ceased to believe, her love for Antony persisted. With tireless tenacity it followed her up, even in the arms of her most fervent admirers, making her feel under their caresses an icy weariness and disgust. Sometimes too his beloved image would suddenly appear and would utter tender reproaches: "What doest thou? Thou art acting as though all were at an end between us. Can'st thou believe such a thing? Knowest thou not that our two souls, in spite of their seeming separation, remain bound the one to the other, and like the billows which the tempest hath driven apart, they will unite again?"

Then tears would flood her comely countenance, and she would try to find excuses for the faithless one. Surely he had not acted of his own free will. Interested parties must have coerced him, they must have wilfully hurried him into this marriage. For after all, who was to profit by it? Who, if not Octavius, had any interest in this alliance? By making him marry his sister she would be like a watch-dog placed by this crafty man at the side of his colleague, and through her instrumentality

he would be put in touch with everything, and would be able to direct the actions of Antony to suit his own ends without perhaps her even suspecting the part he was setting her to play. Ah! The wretch! Then she would again become exasperated, but gradually, and without her knowing it, a growing tenderness was springing up within her, and she would say to the absent one: "Simple-minded Antony! Thou who hadst the right to speak as master, thou who couldst have chosen thy partner and imposed her upon the world, to have thus allowed thyself to be made a pawn, to have been as docile as a child! Ah! The pity of it!"

At the same time hope began to dawn. Did not the very weakness in her lover that had caused her to lose him offer her a chance of restoring him to her? Her lover! Were not the kisses she had imprinted on him indelible? Could not their remembrance cause the fire, not wholly extinct, to leap into flame again? And in one of those transports, which made her blaze up like a torch on which a spark has fallen, she swore: "*I will* have him again! The hour will come when I will take him away from Rome, from Octavia his wife, from all those who think they are stronger than I!"

But not entirely trusting to the thread which, like another Ariadne, she had left in the hands of her Perseus, she put into operation an elaborate system to ensure her success. Octavius had his secret police; she would have hers. Spies were sent out with orders to approach the person of Antony as closely as possible, to penetrate into his house, and obtain by all available means any secret information about the private details of his household.

The first accounts only added to Cleopatra's desolation. The two were happy together; a perfect understanding reigned around the family hearth.

She was not however discouraged. "Though I may have to empty my realm of people," she said to herself, "I will have my eyes everywhere, and some loophole will surely be disclosed at last."

When the first symptoms of disagreement between the two brothers-in-law were reported, especially the one over the cock-fight, her heart felt the sweet sensation of beating again. At last! At last! She perceived the loophole through which that inauspicious edifice might be brought down in ruins. She knew Antony too well to believe that he could for long endure the shadow of a rival. To induce him to leave Rome became at once the end to which she devoted all her efforts. With a perseverance which passion alone could sustain, she organised a secret body of courtiers, freedmen, and servants, whom she charged to keep alive her memory by a timely word, by putting under Antony's eyes certain familiar objects, and by burning near him perfumes sent from Bruchium. The oracle-mongers also had their mission to induce the Triumvir to consult them, and with one accord they all reminded him of the famous words of the horoscope: "The star of thy fortune shineth at its zenith, but that of Octavius seeketh to obscure thine. Thy genius loseth confidence in itself and decreaseth from the moment the two stars appear together."

Devoted adherents in higher places were likewise working for Cleopatra. If some of Antony's friends, such as Pollio and Ahenobarbus, had promoted his marriage and had lost no opportunity of laughing over his past and of expressing their astonishment that a man of his valour had submitted for so long to the yoke of the Egyptian woman, others, more far-seeing than they, had no doubt in their minds that some day or other she would resume her empire over him. Among these was Quintus Dellius, who had negotiated the meeting at Tarsus, and from his knowledge of this passionate woman recognised better than anyone that she was capable of anything in order to retake possession of her lover. There was also a keen observer in Fonteius Capito who wrote before the end of the first year: "In truth the marriage of Antony hath every appearance of happi-

ness, but tedium gnaweth into him as anyone may see."

These men deemed it wise to take steps for the future, and entered into a correspondence with the Queen in which they kept her informed of all that might interest her. Not only was she placed in touch with details of private matters, but she knew of all the complications with which the Triumvir was struggling—the incursions of the Parthians becoming ever more and more audacious, the piracy waged by the bands of Sextus Pompeius along the coast, the outbreaks due to famine, and the refusal of the great majority to pay taxes. All these difficulties in Rome filled her heart with hope. And joy entered into it the day when she learned that Antony had embarked for Athens leaving his wife to the maternal duties which claimed her.

The game however was far from being won, but, for a time at least, the love-sick woman escaped the torture of her imagination when she had been without news, and pictured Octavia as basking in the caresses of Antony. At last they were separated from each other! The wife, like herself, was suffering and languishing in isolation. Even if this thought did not console her altogether it helped her to bear her woes more patiently.

Many alternating currents however were still to shake and test Cleopatra. Sometimes she would feel that everything was lost, and sometimes that she was nearing the end of her trials. The most cruel moment was when she heard of the reconciliation at Tarentum. After having followed every stage of the quarrel with frenzied excitement, and after having scented its consequences, she had told herself: "It is I who shall gather up the pieces of this broken alliance." And then all at once to see this union patched up again was a most bitter disappointment to her.

It was a severe lesson, and would have discouraged anyone else than Cleopatra, but her energy was of tougher mettle. She was moreover gifted with a *clairvoyance* which could not mislead her for long. Although

the pact renewing the understanding between the brothers-in-law had been solemnly ratified and sealed by offerings to the gods, by libations, banquets, and also by the betrothal of the children making doubly and trebly sure the many links which already bound the families of Julius and Antonius, it was evident that the reconciliation would be of short duration.

On Antony's side the execution of the clauses had been immediate. One hundred triremes with prows of brass, twenty light vessels, and a number of Liburnian craft, had already passed over in the port of Tarentum to the flag of Octavius. What was he receiving in exchange? Only promises. The handing over of sixteen legions and a large amount of war material had been stipulated in the treaty, but none of this was ready. He was therefore obliged to trust entirely to the good faith of Octavius. And to anyone who knew him there was little chance of his undertakings being fulfilled.

Nevertheless Antony was counting on him. The loyalty of his character marked him out as a man to be often deceived. But on this occasion especially, having Octavia as an intermediary whose sincerity could not be in doubt, how could he feel any distrust? In a happy frame of mind, therefore, and persuaded that in a short time he would receive the promised reinforcements, he left Italy and set out for Antioch on his grandiose schemes. More tenderly in love with him than ever, and proud of the services she had rendered, his wife accompanied him to Corcyra. There she had to bid him goodbye; he to make ready for his expedition, and she to return to Rome where she would see that the conditions of the pact were carried out as promptly as possible.

Antony's immediate requirements were money. From the time the Triumvirs had begun to exercise increasing pressure upon town and country, robbing the temples and fleecing the population, this indispensable commodity of war had become scarce. It was no use thinking of

raising it in Italy. Greece already had been exploited beyond all bounds. There still remained the provinces of Asia which were always rich, thanks to an advanced knowledge of agriculture, producing a maximum return from the soil. But the landed proprietors were tired of working for the sole profit of Rome. Many evaded taxation by violence or fraud. Several had been beheaded for their reluctance to be despoiled. These proceedings could only produce unfavourable results. In short, Antony was in a great dilemma.

To say that poverty alone made his thoughts turn to Cleopatra would be to misunderstand the complexity of human sentiments. It was true that in moments of difficulty, when the Censors returned empty handed to report their rebuffs, he must have thought of the unlimited treasure of the Lagides, all that wealth stored in underground vaults of unknown depth. If he had not abandoned Egypt all this treasure would have been his, he might have had the disposition of it, and been able to maintain liberally the army he believed would give him a world-wide empire. But what was the use of going back over the past?—it could never be renewed again. Nevertheless he remained deep in thought. His imagination began to wander over the *parterres* of Bruchium, and he beheld again his adored hostess, with her large dark sensuous eyes, her slightly mocking laugh, the golden hue of her skin. He could think of nothing else; it was like a sudden attack of fever. He put his hand to his forehead; it was covered with sweat. How was it that after three years' separation the vision of this woman had still such an imperative hold upon him? During his residence in Rome he had often beheld her in imagination and had recalled her caresses. Even in the arms of Octavia he had more than once felt her taking the place of the one he was then straining to his heart, her unforgettable shadow seeming to be the reality.

These hallucinations had greatly troubled him at the time. The virtuous husband, as for the time being he had

become, struggled against them, honestly rejected these fancies, and would not allow them to assert themselves. But to-day, in this enervating and scented land which reminded him of Tarsus, he was completely under their influence. They filled his brain with dangerous images and poured fire into his veins. He had now no defence against this obsession of his mistress. He saw her in all her different charms, the feline elegance of her figure, her exquisite grace, the refined taste which she brought to her *toilette*. He heard the soft harmony of her voice modulating phrases like imaginary music, and all these pictures called up within him an irresistible longing.

But were these reasons sufficient? Would this craving to press her to his heart again have been enough by itself to triumph over all social rights, over public and private claims, over everything connecting the Triumvir with Roman tradition? No one can state that positively. However that may be, a kind of conspiracy seems to have been on foot to free him from any scruples he may have had. The reinforcements stipulated by Octavius did not arrive, and people who were well informed alleged that they would never come. The embarrassment in which Antony found himself added still further to the baneful influences growing in his heart. Not only did he nourish a rancorous hate against his colleague, whose disloyalty risked compromising his plans, but he went so far as to be unjust towards everyone and everything connected with his brother-in-law. Good and helpful as Octavia had been she also was becoming suspect. Was it not an unpardonable wrong to be the sister of the most perfidious of men? In addition, she had the misfortune of not being present to defend herself. If absence is a mirage bringing out clearly the faces of certain people, it must be confessed that others disappear from view as in a haze. And thus each day rendered fainter the gentle outline of the wife, and brought out more vividly the image of the irresistible mistress.

It was Fonteius Capito who, accurately reading the

anxious mind of his chief, gave the deciding touch. One day when Antony had just met with a fresh disappointment upon receiving only a quarter of the sum he had expected from the demands levied upon the Peloponese, Fonteius uttered these simple words :

"Cleopatra only asketh to be allowed to lend thee all the money thou hast need of."

Antony staggered as one who had received a sudden shock.

"How knowest thou?"

"She hath charged me to tell thee."

What! She was still thinking of him! After all the wrong he had done her she still wished him well! He thought he was dreaming. His looks searched Capito as though he feared he would withdraw the words he had just uttered. But it was not so. Explanations followed, and Antony now had the certainty that Cleopatra had never ceased to think of him, to love him. O what a miracle is love! After being stabbed, flouted, trodden under foot and soiled, it rises up again, or rather shows it has never ceased to be a living thing! In a moment his broken forces reasserted themselves. It was like the ecstatic surprise of a man emerging from a long illness, a convalescent coming back to life, and marvelling to find it fairer than he had ever remembered it.

Fonteius Capito was despatched to Alexandria but he had no need to employ that diplomacy which Quintus Dellius on a former occasion had required to decide the Queen to follow him. She was ready. The time for coquetry had gone by. All that concerned her now was to take entire possession of her lover, and to wage against her rival a struggle in which the most astute, the most enduring, and the least scrupulous, should get the upper hand. Her correspondence had enlightened her as to the difficulties with which Antony was struggling. She knew that he was without money and had insufficient troops on the eve of starting on his campaign. Help was indispensable. She would be that help, that bountiful intervener,

who at the last moment would turn fortune in his favour.

Ships were loaded with bullion, beasts of burden, engines of war, abundant supplies of corn, in fact with everything that makes for the strength of armies. The purple sails of the royal galley were hoisted as soon as the ships were full right up to the gunwale. Negroes from the land of Cush took up their silver-handled oars, and through the favouring billows the lover hastened to her goal.

This time Antony was awaiting Cleopatra at Antioch, that same Antioch where, five years earlier, he had first dreamed of her under the palms and cedar trees. When she came in sight standing beneath the silken pavilion under a glowing sky, eagerly straining forward as though urging the vessel on to greater speed, he thought his emotion would make him swoon. His sight became dim and he had a buzzing in his ears. It seemed to him that the sea was beating against his heart. To the accompaniment of acclamations and a fanfare of trumpets he conducted the traveller to the old palace of the Seleucides, which had been prepared for her reception after the splendour of Alexandria.

When they were alone they looked at each other without speaking a word. Many days, many sensations had passed over them; they needed a little time to recognise each other. Was that anxious brow that of the son of Bacchus? And she too, though still quite young and more beautiful than ever, had evidently suffered. Her lips were still full and ardent, but an expression of bitterness had changed them. Her face had no longer the serenity it had before. There had been storms to trouble her. She had bruised her forehead against the hard rock of passions. Her royal heart, which had only dreamed to subjugate, had passed through a humiliating subjection to disappointed love. Even at that very moment when she was so near to triumph she felt herself the prey of contradictory emotions. While feeling the



The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra at Antioch
(From the painting, by *Thucydides*)

invincible attraction he still possessed for her, she seemed to be uttering this reproach to herself: "Can one still love a man who had preferred another woman?"

"What art thou thinking?" asked Antony in a hoarse voice which revealed his fear of what she might reply.

"I am thinking that thou dost no longer love me, that thou hast never loved me."

"Say not that!"

But she was determined to remind him how culpable he had been, if only to show him afterwards the magnanimity of her pardon.

"If thou hadst really loved me couldst thou have had the heart to abandon me? To betray me after so many promises? To leave me lonely, humiliated, a prey to grief?"

Kneeling before her in an attitude of profound repentance Antony endeavoured to exculpate himself. He loved her, he had always loved her. Not for one moment had he broken the link that united them.

And when she listened with an air of irony he went on:

"What dost thou know of the events, the political necessities to which I had to yield? What knowest thou of all I have suffered?"

But she persisted:

"If thou hadst loved me in very truth . . ."

He did not let her finish. Springing forward with a bound he sought to embrace her. His quivering lips implored her own.

"Grant me pardon! Tell me that thou dost forgive me?"

Cleopatra wavered, then with one more effort she turned away leaving her suppliant to believe that she would always be inflexible.

"Unhappy man that I am!" he cried. "The longing I have for thee was never more intense than at this very moment when I confess thou hast the right to abhor and to curse me!"

From beneath the shadow of her beautiful eye-lashes she looked at him. A slight trembling at the throat revealed the emotion which made her equally a prey to love.

"'Tis true, I *have* reviled thee," she confessed. "But to *abhor* thee, how could that be?"

At last! They clasped one another in a passionate embrace as if to crush out the memory of all that had separated them. And to tell the truth in those first moments they forgot all the baseness, the treachery, the bitter thoughts. Everything apart from happiness, that vast happiness of meeting again, faded away and was as though it had never been. They felt they had come back to their true realm, apart from which they would surely languish and die. The time since they had been separated seemed like a great void wherein things lose themselves. They had found again the secret paths of their destiny, which once before had led them to each other and had now brought them back together for ever. Henceforth, whatever might happen, the idolising lovers were to travel hand in hand with no other possibility, no other dream, than to be all in all to each other. Together they were to go forward to triumph, then to adversity, and as lords of their destinies to the end of life (since they were to learn how to take leave of it at the moment fixed by themselves) they were to enter into the realm of legend.

Antony had much ado to obtain pardon. Deeply conscious of the wrong he had done his mistress, he made himself her slave, exerting himself to gratify her every wish. No lover ever showed himself more magnificent. She had a taste for literature; he enriched with two hundred thousand *papyri*, taken from Pergamos, the library at Alexandria which she had just restored. She was a lover of art; several sanctuaries were despoiled and their treasures transported to Alexandria. To present her with kingdoms was as easy to him as it was

to some men to cover with jewels the women they love and to lay their fortunes at their feet. Invested with sovereign power, he disposed of Roman provinces as if they were his own patrimony. After wealthy Phœnicia, which had been given to her some time back as the price of a wager, the kingdoms of Cilicia, Chalcidia and Arabia Nabathea were annexed to Egypt. The Queen coveted Judæa, the land of spices and palm-trees, with its city of Jerusalem whither flowed the gold of the Jews from the four quarters of the world; but King Herod who had recovered his kingdom after a severe struggle, was difficult to dislodge. Antony granted him his throne, being an ally he needed, on condition that he should hand over to Cleopatra the revenues of his fairest domains, so that the palms of Samaria and the roses of Jericho should henceforth bloom only for her.

Some rigid members of Antony's court, with Ahenobarbus at their head, who never feared to express openly what others murmured in a whisper, cried out against this free use of Roman property. But mad with pride as well as with love Antony replied: "Ye short-sighted men, do ye not understand that the grandeur of Rome is shown less by her conquests and the extent of her possessions than by the generosity which her wealth permiteth?"

And, as a matter of fact, was it such bad policy to strengthen and aggrandise the woman who aspired to be not only his ally, but his wife? For Cleopatra had never given up her old scheme. Weary of fortune that had ever escaped her grasp, and of elusive crowns that had vanished like smoke, she had learned experience and was now determined to put her plan at once into execution. When Antony was making ready to draw upon the treasure of Egypt was it not fair that she should share in the advantages? Inasmuch as she was also aiding him in the conquest of Persia which would make him without an equal, had she not a claim to become his consort, to be present with him

on that day of triumph when he would ascend the Capitol?

Such a complete identification of her own interests with those of Antony has led some minds to see in Cleopatra only a calculating woman who coldly looked at everything in the face, weighing everything, and using Antony only as a docile instrument. To deny that she had her own plans, and that, knowing his weakness, she was determined to reign with him, to direct his actions most advantageously to herself, would be to close one's eyes to evidence. But have love and self-interest ever been irreconcilable? Would Cleopatra have loved Antony less because she had dreamed of becoming sovereign of the world? Away with such a thought! Far from love and ambition proving self-destructive, do we not often see, on the contrary, both of them so joined together as to be indistinguishable, so closely intermingled that from their alloy are welded chains of brass against which the blows of destiny hurl themselves in vain? To marry Antony, to unite her lot with a man as lovable and attractive as he was powerful, to possess him definitely as something that would never more escape her, was therefore what this clear-sighted and imperious woman was bent upon realising, and what she meant to carry out with all the audacity of a nature who recognised neither laws nor gods.

Serious obstacles however rose before her, the most important of which, it goes without saying, was the marriage he had contracted with Octavia. Divorce certainly was not rare in Rome nor was it difficult to obtain. If in earlier times, in a society based upon religious beliefs and respect for the home, adultery had been the essential condition, it was now granted for far less grave offences. Incompatibility of temper, provided it was pleaded by both parties, was accepted by the Prætor as a sufficient cause, and even of late the relaxation in morals had become such that people had repudiated the mother of their children for no more serious reason

than that she had ceased to please, or that someone else was preferred.

But how was it possible to inflict a wrong like this upon a woman who by birth and position was placed on Olympian heights? And what charge could be brought against the unstained and much revered sister of Octavius? This was not all. An ancient law inscribed on the *Twelve Tables* expressly prohibited any marriage between Roman officials and foreign women. This law had always been rigorously applied and its disastrous effect can be imagined if it were transgressed by the first citizen of the Republic.

Antony tried to coax her, he tried to make the loving but imprudent woman understand the danger of the cruel and unreasonable act she was demanding. He pictured the howling mob, ever ready to overturn its idols and change them for others, taking the side of Octavia; he pictured the anger of the Senate, and every buckler raised against Cleopatra.

But she persisted in her resolve and determined to have her revenge. She evoked the memory of Cæsar.

"Although he was married to Calpurnia, although he was faced with the same obstacles which to thee appear insurmountable, he would not have hesitated to divide with me the cake of meal that consecrates espousals, and before all the world to proclaim me his wife."

"Yes, after his return from Persia," observed Antony. "After the shouts of victory had been raised to such a pitch that they stifled all recriminations. I too, after I have conquered. . . ."

But Cleopatra had endured too cruel an experience of what might happen in the course of a separation to have any mind to wait. Her marriage was to be the express condition of her pardon. This she had only accorded under the emotion of the first moments, and every day since then her offended temper was taking it back bit by bit. Paroxysms of jealousy, reproaches, and bitter mocking of his legitimate wife ceaselessly reminded the

brother-in-law of Octavius of her own wrongs and the necessity of repairing them.

The man who had lived under Fulvia's training knew too well what must sometimes be borne from women. The claws of the tigress, far from exhausting his passion, excited it. He felt himself drawn to her for life. With her power to enrich life tenfold, with her pretty and wild outbursts, her quarrels ending in fainting fits, with all these accompaniments of passion which made up the daily course of their life, how could he return to the tameness of virtuous sentiment, how could he go back to the routine of married life? He therefore gave his consent. The marriage should be celebrated during the first days of spring before the army entered upon the campaign.

When the friends of the Triumvir learnt of this extravagant project they held up their hands in dismay. If from fear of displeasing him men like Quintus Dellius, Fonteius Capito, and Plancus, who only lived on his favours, kept silent, others, more independent, made no bones about giving vent to their opinions. This marriage would be a very grave revolutionary act, an unprecedented scandal which might overthrow the whole policy of Rome. The whole of public opinion would be lifted up against this contempt for their most ancient traditions. The Patricians, insulted in their order, would make common cause on the side of Octavia, and who could measure the consequences of the anger of Octavius when he should learn of the affront put upon his own sister?

Fully alive to the justice of these warnings Antony hesitated and interposed delays. On every side storms were hovering over his head. By dint of alarming Cleopatra and showing her the peril of a scandal he was not in a position to impose by force, he obtained her consent for the moment to a middle course. The marriage should take place as he had promised, the official act should be inscribed on the civil registers of Antioch and

Alexandria, but until the termination of the war no official notification should be made to the Senate, so that while he became the husband of the wealthy Egyptian Queen he would at the same time remain lawfully married (*justum matrimonium*) to the woman whom he had wedded according to the rites of Latin monogamy.

This arrangement could not be reconciled with common sense. It was impossible that a man could at one and the same time bear the title of King of Egypt and that of Emperor, or that a Proconsul could arrogate to himself the right to possess, like a Satrap, several legitimate wives. But on this matter the lover of Cleopatra had his head turned. From his earliest years fortune had always smiled upon him and this factor together with his own habitual moral depravity conspired together to make him entertain what was absurd. Without making up his mind to a choice he claimed every advantage he could get. At a time when it was most necessary to appear before his allies with the title and authority of Triumvir he was not going to renounce it. Just as he lacked the courage to reject the royal hand offering him love and treasure, so he would not consent to loose the other hand by whom he was connected with his Roman prerogatives. At this mad time, when no reverse as yet had taught him moderation, his frenzied nature demanded from life its utmost possibilities. He acknowledged no limits, no restrictions. The whole world lay before him like one vast field whose entire harvest was his due.

To the wedding gifts he had already presented to Cleopatra he added the island of Crete whose thick forests of maple, white satin-wood, sandal-wood, ebony, and the luxuriant larch, furnished choice essences distilled from their wood, and masts for ships to swell her ports.

Although she was fully alive to its value his munificence however did not suffice Cleopatra. As a goddess her cult entailed holocausts. She meant to exact her

price in return for the gold of Egypt. Since Antony had not consented to repudiate Octavia he must solemnly engage never to see her again.

"The man who seeketh peace of mind doth not heed promises," an old proverb assures us. Moreover, with his back turned to Rome and the fascination of the East before him, what recked he of the guardian of his Lares and Penates, the woman he believed to be wholly taken up with the care of her children? Antony deceived himself. Little versed in psychology, he had not discerned the fire underlying the modest exterior of the noble woman whom the Athenians had likened to their goddess Minerva, the loving heart craving her share of happiness.

Since they had bid goodbye at Corcyra Octavia had been thinking only of her husband. No longer able to lavish on him the caresses with which her heart was overflowing she said to herself: "I will help him. Though far from me he shall feel the constant acts of my love." And at once she set about getting together money, provisions, equipment and everything that might aid a general on his campaign. Better still, when she could not obtain from Octavius the troops he had promised, she raised by her own powers of persuasion two thousand picked men equipping them out of her own money, and happy in the thought that these fine, brave, and magnificently accoutred volunteers would form an invincible cohort round the person of the Emperor, she embarked and accompanied them to Greece.

When he heard with what precious freight Octavia had arrived at the Piræus, Antony was sorely troubled. His was not one of those hardened natures who do wrong from preference, or even quite unconsciously. Weakness of character, as we have seen, was his principal fault. He always acted impetuously, and afterwards turned away from the consequences of his acts with the thoughtlessness of a child. To him the present moment was everything, and quite eclipsed the future. In marrying Cleopatra, and in taking an oath not to see Octavia again,

he had counted upon time and distance to lessen the force of everything, and trusted no doubt upon some favour from the gods who had never yet failed him. And now, all of a sudden, he was face to face with an accomplished fact and found himself in the grip of a dilemma whose two alternatives led him equally into an impossible position. He could not think of refusing the valuable reinforcements which Octavia had brought, but to receive this generous gift without accepting it in person, without even rewarding with a kiss this messenger from heaven, seemed to him so base that his heart was full of shame at the thought of it. But what was he to do? For Cleopatra was with him, bewitching and headstrong, jealously guarding her rights and determined not to give up any of them. Heated explanations broke out.

"What! Art thou already thinking of violating thy engagements?" upbraided his new wife.

These words made Antony ponder. He listened to them with a strange perplexity in the depths of his heart. His engagements! Which of them must he heed? The last are always the most pressing, and to render them still more potent her arms, cool as running water, were round his neck, and her lips, sweet as honey, were close to his own.

But the image of Octavia likewise possessed its power. By coming nearer to him the gentle woman regained a little of the empire she had for three years exercised upon the soul of Antony. Without reading it again he was constantly hearing the appeal she had addressed to him: "Wherefore dost thou not come?" she had said in a letter from Athens. "Have I displeased thee in aught? I thought I had done well in bringing the men and armaments which thou didst charge me to assemble. Have I erred? I am told thou art on the eve of thy great expedition. Can I not embrace thee before thy departure? If thou wilt give me leave I will cross the waters that separate us. If not, I will

await thee here. In very truth I live but to serve thee, to await thy bidding. If however thou dost repulse my services and my waiting be in vain, what is to become of me ? ”

This tender and devoted submission stirred the heart-strings of the runaway. He would have wished to respond, not with love—the flame once enkindled by the virtuous charms of the Roman woman was extinguished—but as we have pointed out, his conscience was not altogether dead. One is even surprised at times to catch more than a fleeting glance of it in that soul darkened by Epicureanism, to see him suffering and seeking to repair one evil even while committing another. Many of his contemporaries even affirm that he mourned the death of Fulvia whose hideous devotion he had repaid with so much ingratitude. To-day it was Octavia’s turn to move him. With just a suspicion of tenderness, a pity that is only skin deep, which men preserve towards the women they have loved in spite of the wrong they have done them, he pleaded :

“ I will only be absent three days. Three days ! What is that to those who have the whole of life before them ? ”

But he could not escape the suspicious looks of Cleopatra. Too cruelly she had learnt to be distrustful. To possess the man she loved, to guard him jealously, to defend him against any outside attempts, was now her chief concern. Nothing else mattered, neither the tears of the woman who had once robbed him from her, nor the present scruples of Antony. No, no ; she would not yield. Antony should never look upon Octavia again.

The military preparations were advancing. Antioch was now an armed camp. Every day cohorts were seen marching with firm tread through the gate of Daphne making the stone paving of the streets resound under their *cothurni*. Glittering cavalry showed keen young faces amid a sea of lances. Greeks and Gauls advanced in promiscuous order, preceded by their standards. Then

followed the press of baggage—mules bent under the weight of stones and axes, camels loaded up like ships, chariots making the old silent buildings resound with their clatter as they rolled by. And as they passed on yet others followed, raising up the dust as they came and went, for the army was numerous and well provisioned.

Then Antony himself made ready to start for those plains of Mesopotamia which lay far distant over the misty horizon. The thought of this fresh separation, which could not fail to be long and carried great risks, for the Parthians were reputed to be the most treacherous and perfidious of enemies, no doubt alarmed Cleopatra. She could not help thinking with sorrow of those delights which had made the nights seem short and the days ineffable which were now vanishing. But a still greater anxiety had first place in her thoughts. It was true that Antony had not gone against his promise; he had not crossed the belt of sea which separated him from Greece, but Octavia was there, ever expecting and watching for him, and able to send him messages. In spite of his loving thralldom of which he did not cease to give proof, Cleopatra feared a surreptitious escape, some subterfuge which might restore him to her rival, if only for an hour. Before she herself went back to Egypt she therefore determined that Octavia should return to Rome. There, at any rate, she would have the bitter satisfaction of knowing her to be further separated from their joint husband than she was herself.

Several times already Cleopatra had insisted that things should be arranged as she had planned, but she had always encountered on the part of Antony, not exactly resistance, but evasiveness and delay which amounted to a refusal to obey her. Acute anger brooded in the depths of her heart. Her beautiful eye-brows became contracted into a frown and darkened her look.

She had shown herself more gloomy than usual that morning, and before leaving for the camp to review the troops Antony had tenderly enquired of her :

"Thou art sad? What trouble tormenteth thee?"

Without brightening up she replied:

"Thou knowest. I cannot suffer the presence of Octavia so near to us."

He affected indifference.

"How doth she disturb us since we do not see her?"

But Cleopatra went on:

"She hath come to defy me."

Without entering upon any argument, which he knew would have been useless, Antony simply murmured:

"The poor woman!" and went out to join his escort waiting for him beneath the window, and impatiently pawing the ground.

Left to herself Cleopatra felt profoundly miserable. With that acute faculty, possessed by passionate natures, of rending their hearts when one of their wishes is not gratified, she imagined Antony deceiving her, wavering, and ready to betray her again. The exclamation he had uttered still rang in her ears. "The poor woman! Ah! How he had said it! What pity in his intonation, what assurance that the woman in question was incapable of doing what she accused her of. Could he love her still? After all it was not impossible that this intriguing woman had preserved some influence over his feeble heart which she had once been clever enough to get possession of. In any case he was mindful of her, that was evident." Such a conviction could not fail to torment the soul of one who would have liked to confiscate the whole world for her own profit. Cleopatra could not rest until Octavia was far away. With a spasmodic movement of her whole being she swore to herself she would that very day obtain her removal.

When the Emperor returned in the evening with the confident expectancy of a man who at the end of his day's work looks for some token of reward, he met with the jarring surprise of a welcome lacking any tenderness. Cleopatra was determined to restore her smile only in return for a decisive act. She began by complaining.

"Thou art sacrificing our happiness for a woman who should be nothing to thee."

"Since indeed I love but thee there is naught to displease thee," he replied.

"Nevertheless, thou art thoughtful for her," she said.

He had defended himself already against this reproach and had explained his motives so often that further words seemed useless.

"How thou dost hate her!" was all he answered in a tone of voice which conveyed: "How unjust thou art!"

This reproach exasperated Cleopatra. In a transport of anger she ejaculated:

"And thou! Who can tell if thou hast ceased to love her?"

In love affairs it is kisses which carry persuasion and these she refused him. Dejected and baulked, like a man deprived of the principal joy of life, he asked sadly:

"What wouldst thou? What proof doth thou exact?"

A roll of *papyrus* lay prepared on the table.

"Write!" answered the despot. "Order Octavia to return to Rome as quickly as possible."

The ungrateful act demanded of him went against the customary courtesy of Antony. Never in his life had he behaved meanly with a woman. Must he act like some low camp follower to the woman who had the right to expect the utmost consideration and gratitude? He hesitated. His hand rested inert on his knee.

"And thou dost pretend to love me!" she murmured, with her mouth so close to his that he could feel her breath.

If he resisted he felt that never again would her sweet breath mingle with his own, that he would have to part, to go far away to fight without that embrace which infuses courage into men and promises them glory. Bereft of this powerful support it seemed to him that

nothing would be worth trying for, that his great campaign would be in vain, that all would end in naught.

With a quick movement Cleopatra thrust the *stylus* between his fingers.

"Write!" she said.

Slowly, clumsily, as one who cannot find his words, he drew up a letter.

"Sign it, now!"

And he wrote his name at the foot of the lines.

All had been prepared. The roll was passed round the rod. Under the impress of the seal the wax yielded like raw flesh. An officer was in attendance for orders. The letter was given him with the command to carry it to Octavia without losing a moment.

The next instant they heard him galloping with loosened rein over the paved road towards Seleucia. There he would find a galley which would transport him in a few hours to the Piræus.

His gentle wife was counting the days without knowing what reason to give for Antony's silence. It would soon be a whole month since her arrival, a whole month waiting for a reply to her letters. A few hints dropped by her suite might have put her in the way of guessing the truth. She knew that the Queen of Egypt had landed in Asia and that this insidious woman had placed her gold at the disposal of the Emperor. They talked of a political alliance between them. Even the words "secret marriage" had been uttered. But the awful certainty could not so easily enter such an upright soul as Octavia's, quite unprepared as she was. More was required than mere gossip to establish the truth, to make it clear and certain. Nothing less was needed than the word of Antony which, alas! was on its way. But Antony still refrained from disclosing the whole truth to the unfortunate woman. Under the pretext of some necessity having arisen for him to leave Antioch sooner than he had expected he merely expressed in cold terms

his regret at being unable to come and thank her in person and enjoined her to set sail at once and return to live in Rome.

On reading these lines so void of all love, wherein the signature was all she recognised of her beloved husband, Octavia felt turned to stone. What was the matter with him? Then all of a sudden suspicions burst forth from her grief. Clear vision came to her eyes. What an appalling moment when the truth was forced upon her that she was no longer the woman he loved! No matter how opposed to deception a woman may be she nevertheless regrets the previous hour that has passed, when at least her misfortune was unknown to her. Nothing could reassure her now, nothing could make her any longer a dupe. She must drink to the last drop the bitter draught of *knowledge*.

On the morrow Octavia again rounded the island of Iliissus, obedient to the will of one she had always regarded as the master of her actions. Hidden by the sails which concealed her tear-stained countenance the Athenians watched her going away and leaving behind their fair city of song and games, where in memory of Dionysus they had crowned her with myrtle. They saw her taking the lonely road that Agar, Penelope, Ariadne, and many others had followed before her, that road which the inconstancy of man will encumber with her abandoned sisters to the end of time.

Cleopatra was triumphant. She had again resumed complete control of the chariot on its victorious course. Recovering her passion for Antony, as was the case every time she felt him yield to her despotic force, she covered him with caresses. She would have loved not to leave him. But the hour had come. Like another Jason he was going forward to bury himself in distant lands whence he looked to bring back the Golden Fleece. Sometimes on horseback galloping with the grace of a Thalestris (queen of the Amazons), sometimes reclining

in the depths of her litter, she was always by his side. Ornamented at each corner with a bunch of ostrich feathers, and fastened with crystal chains, her litter was borne on the shoulders of twelve Nubians. Silk curtains closed it in and when the wind lifted them there could be seen two faces closely touching one another. When night came a tent was erected. With its roof of gold, its sides of scarlet tissue, its lamps burning resin and outlining its shape, it gave the effect of a blazing bonfire in the midst of the camp.

When the time came to part it was there that the travellers built up fair visions. On his return, yea, his early return, their marriage would be proclaimed. Their brows would be circled with the double crown which each was to bring to the other. The world would be theirs, it would be their palace of enchantment, their garden of illimitable glory, for dreams of greatness ever mingled with their love, making them conceive it as triumphant and surrounded with trophies.

On the farewell morning their hands once more clasped each other at the moment of parting. For a long time they looked at one another. Then without speaking, but with that insistent look which seeks to imprint on the mind the beloved face before it has gone from sight, Cleopatra sighed :

“To-morrow ! Soon my eyes will see thee no more ! ”

“ Mine will always behold thee, for thou will remain more present to me than the light of the sun by day and the stars by night,” replied Antony.

In order to look at him a little longer she climbed a hillock dominating the country around. Shut in at this point by rocks the waters of the river developed the force of a torrent and, bursting forth into foam, resumed their course in a resounding roar.

When Antony reached the further side he turned round and saluted Cleopatra one last time, describing a dazzling circle with his sword. Before him a deep valley opened. In the transparent air everything was bathed

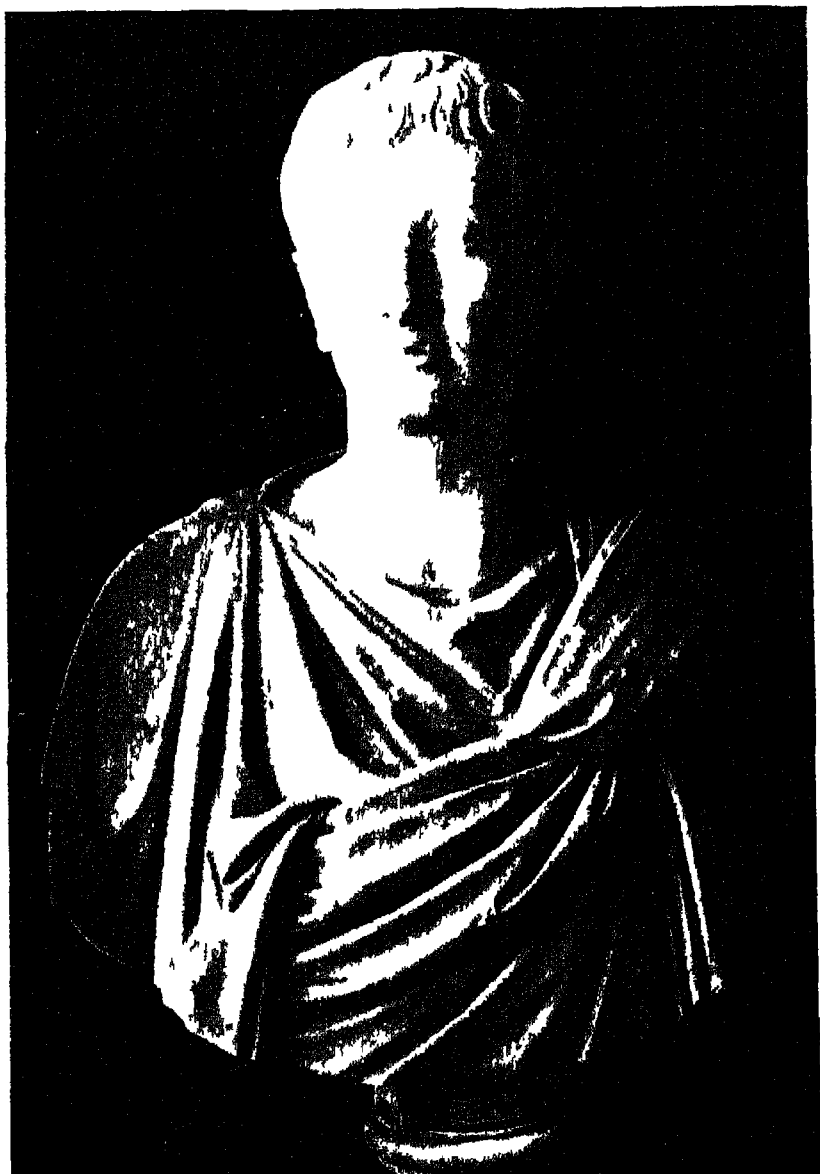
in light, crops were bowing down their heads ready for harvest. The mighty shadow of Alexander seemed to be pointing out his way. He threw himself impetuously forward, and his horse devoured space. A broad purple mantle floated behind his shoulders.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TWO RIVALS

NOTWITHSTANDING the precautions taken to keep them secret the events at Antioch had come to the knowledge of Octavius. His resentment was very keen. Besides the insult offered to his sister, which touched him to the quick, he could not contemplate with calmness an alliance adding a crown to the many advantages possessed by his colleague over him. Was this gay adventurer Antony now to have a fresh success against the Parthians? To Greece, Egypt, and Asia Minor, which formed his portion in the Triumvirate, would he also annex Armenia and Persia, and all that fabulous East over which the unparalleled glory of Alexander had soared? His renown and power would be formidable. To what pinnacle would he not be raised? These reflections aroused in the soul of Octavius an ocean of hate. Judging however that the time had not yet come to reveal his real sentiments he feigned ignorance of the matrimonial complications in which Octavia's husband had become engaged, and adopted towards him the attitude most suitable to the circumstances.

At first this took the form of an ostentatious display of fraternal feeling. By pious libations and sacrifices he gave the appearance of imploring the favour of the gods on behalf of an expedition which he wished with his whole soul to come to grief; then, keeping silence



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Marble Bust of Octavius in the Louvre

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over his own personal grievances, he took upon himself to be the censor of Antony's personal morality.

Remonstrances on the part of a man whose recent marriage, preceded by adultery and rape, had scandalised respectable people, could only provoke ridicule. In any case, they brought back to him a reply which was not lacking in point and purpose in spite of its cynicism. "With what dost thou reproach me?" asked Antony writing from Alexandria whither he had gone to embrace Cleopatra during the interval between two periods of the war. "Why dost thou presume to reproach me? Is it on account of my relations with the Queen? But they are not a thing of yesterday; for nine years, as thou dost know, I have been her lover. And thou, hast thou ever been faithful to any woman? I would wager that when thou dost read this letter Livia will already have had cause to complain of thee, and that thou wilt have badly treated either Tertullia, or Terentilla, or Rufilla, or indeed all of them. Provided only that a man serve the gods what matter with whom he taketh his pleasure?"

As we have seen, Antony himself was in no hurry to raise the mask and acknowledge his pseudo-marriage. Before coming to that and risking a public reprobation, which anyone could see would spread far beyond a family matter, he was waiting until his second Persian campaign had given happier results than the first. Then, surrounded with the prestige of a conqueror which would permit him to brave everything, he would have no fear of raising a protest. Tearing himself therefore from the loving and impassioned arms of Cleopatra once more he set out for the seat of war.

His legions were awaiting him on the frontiers of Media, and as usual he was given a joyful welcome. They were seasoned troops who had already fought under his command and felt the enthusiasm of his military qualities every time they found themselves again under their general. In giving him their reliance these men, who knew something of the breadth of his ambitions, built

up great hopes. All were persuaded that his good fortune would also mean their own, and that in consequence they would become as glorious, and richer even than Cæsar's veterans. How could they help believing in the success of this incomparable leader, this keen and ardent tactician, who was always on the spot where his supervision was needed, this genius who was prompt to decide in moments of danger, who was never cast down and who laughed at privations?

His popularity was too precious to Antony not to seek to add to it by every means in his power. He had always been generous, but he further won their hearts by allowing the same epicurean indulgence to his subordinates as to himself. This gay liver would have only cheery faces round him. Reserving his severity for the march and times of action, he permitted in camp a relaxation of discipline and behaviour such as had never been seen before. And what a difference there was between the old phalanxes led by a Marius—brave men certainly, but marching under the scourge of the Lictor—and the spontaneous zeal with which Mark Antony's soldiers suffered and died for him! When shut in amid the narrow passes of Armenia, enduring the discomforts of fatigue, cold and hunger, was not the defiant reply they gave to the messenger of Phraates, who treacherously came to counsel them to make peace, a striking testimony of their devotion? "No!" these brave men answered, "let us rather subsist on the bark of trees than surrender our cause."

His lieutenants were no less valiant. Associated in the grandiose schemes of their lord whose confidence many had enjoyed during long night watches in his tent, these young men loved fighting and hoped for much gain and glory from it. Ruined by the revolutions the majority counted on its chances for restoring their fortunes, and brought with them the fanaticism of the gambler.

It was with elements like these that Antony had undertaken the Persian campaign which in spite of great

deeds accomplished was only to give incomplete results. From the first he should have had misgivings regarding a country which the enemy held with all its forces, whereas he had to transport his own. Deceived by his own natural optimism, as well as by the reports of his intelligence staff who had only made a superficial survey, he imagined that it would be sufficient to plant a Roman wedge within the ancient kingdom of Darius for the whole of this well-worn granite rampart to fall to the ground in a cloud of dust. In the shock of encounter he perceived that the Medes, the Parthians, Armenians, and all the different races composing them, had not lost all their former valour. It was brought home to him in a cruel manner before Phaaspa, where by an unexpected manoeuvre the enemy turned his lines of circumvallation and obliged him to raise the siege ; and still more forcibly during the retreat he had to effect at the beginning of winter pursued by a murderous hail of arrows through regions already devastated.

These disasters could have been avoided if his haste to rejoin Cleopatra had not made him hurry forward operations which demanded further time. He returned from his amorous quest provided with new troops, with reinforcements of artillery and fresh material. This time the campaign was more fortunate. He defeated the Armenians, obliged King Phraates to restore the standards formerly captured from the legions of Crassus, and was able to despatch to the Senate glowing reports which sent the hot breath of victory over Rome.

While the Emperor was giving these proofs of skill and audacity on the plains of Erzeroum, Octavius, no less determined to bid for the first place, was looking about for means to accomplish his purpose. Fighting was not his strong point. Lacking personal courage he preferred intrigue to action. Thoroughly convinced, nevertheless, that the highest position in Rome could only be gained by the man who accomplished great things by force of

arms he had resigned himself to this course. Circumstances, moreover, left him no other choice. His colleagues were all busily engaged, one in Asia, the other in the African provinces. Upon him it devolved to suppress the depredations of Sextus Pompeius. After many reverses and one success in the Sicilian waters resulting in the surrender of the hundred and sixty ships of the pirate fleet, he was able to vaunt to the Senate, almost at the same moment that Antony announced his victory, that he himself had delivered the Republic from a tenacious and formidable enemy.

These achievements were not sufficiently brilliant to insure a definite ascendancy to either Triumvir. If Antony however had presented himself in person, preceded by the eagles whose loss by Crassus had been so wounding to the pride of the Romans, and laden with the enormous booty he had taken from the enemy; if, leading King Artavastes with his wife and children in his train of captives, and, crowned with the golden bay leaf he had driven down the Via Sacra in the chariot drawn by the four white horses which had borne Cæsar, Sulla, Marius and the Scipios, he had harangued the crowd saying: "Behold I am your lord," who knows what might have happened?

It was not only with the army that Antony was popular. His good nature, his straightforwardness, and the care he had always shown in recompensing any service rendered, had made friends for him everywhere, especially among the Ædiles. Many whose words carried weight were glad to sing his praises and by skilful allusions to raise cheers at his name.

Far then from his absence being a disadvantage to the Emperor it had served his interests, for in times of trouble men impute their sufferings to the government whose acts they are in a position to judge, while their imagination glorifies those who are winning renown at a distance. If then, we repeat, Antony had been wise enough to profit by his good fortune, if on the morrow of his conquest of Media he had come to Rome bringing his

trophies with him, and as a good citizen had made his obeisance before the statue of Jupiter, no one can say whether the imperial crown refused to Cæsar would not have been placed on his head. But as the wisdom of old Homer hath it : " What can be expected of a man who hath made himself the slave of a woman ? "

As a matter of fact, from fear lest he should escape her, Cleopatra had gone to await her lover on the shores of Asia. She possessed important interests there and took the opportunity of looking into them. Judæa in particular attracted her for she had been unable to obtain its complete control, and King Herod owed her a tribute of several millions. Perhaps she was curious too to see the fair Mariamne who was said to exercise a wonderful fascination over the heart of the king.

It was not without alarm that the Jewish sovereigns welcomed the arrival of Antony's wanton and formidable mistress in their palace at Jerusalem, which was consecrated to them by their own love and by the memory of the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon. Cleopatra however was too well aware of the favour bestowed upon Herod by her lover to do anything against his interests. It is also said that a very feminine desire to try the effect of her shafts on a heart reputed to be invulnerable led her to attempt a dalliance which nearly cost her her life.

Like all amorous women Mariamne was jealous, and she became fiercely so at the sight of Cleopatra who, though perhaps less beautiful than herself whose own rich reddish hair and milk-white skin of the family of Asmon had no equal, she knew to be a woman who captivated the minds of men by her deep gaze, and compelling, and entertaining conversation.

One evening when they had retired to their apartments after Cleopatra had sung, danced, and displayed all her charms, Mariamne thought she noticed her husband less attentive than usual. With one bound her hatred leaped to a paroxysm of rage.

"Thou art thinking of *her*!" she burst forth with all the fury of a lioness. And in spite of the perfectly sincere denials of Herod she asked that the visitor be forthwith put to death.

Put an end to the Queen of Egypt! The ally of Rome! It would be a serious stroke! If the king hesitated it was not because his bloodstained soul entertained the least scruples as to employing dagger or poison. Neither had the tricks of the siren troubled his senses. No, he too execrated the woman whose yoke pressed on his cupidity. His interest in freeing himself from her was undoubted, but the risk was great; dare he run it?

Coiled round him like the serpent in Eden, Mariamne cajoled and implored him.

"Dost thou not see that this woman is a danger to the universe? Antony himself would be the gainer by being rid of her."

Herod however would not let himself be persuaded. He discussed the question, objected, and in the end came to a most prudent conclusion. Instead of the amorous homage Cleopatra had hoped for, he loaded her with gifts, and without her having suspected the peril from which her life had just escaped, conducted her back to the frontier in the attitude of a respectful vassal.

During the few days she had passed in the neighbourhood of the Temple of Temples, had the learned pupil of Apollodorus been tempted to open any of the Biblical Books? Had she learned that the time was near at hand when the Messiah should be born? Had she intuition of that future kingdom which would rise on the ruins of the world as it then was, on that land of Judæa whose soil she trod as a despot? Had she caught a glimpse of the end of a civilisation of which she herself was the rarest, the most perfect emanation? It is not probable. Like all those on the topmost heights Cleopatra only thought of increase, progress, and glorious realisation. How could she imagine that what had taken so

many centuries to build would disappear like straw in the wind? Besides, the moment was propitious for fair dreams rather than for philosophic disquietude. Antony was returning victorious. Now was the time to proclaim their marriage, to prove that she alone had any right to the puissant Emperor. With an eager and joyful heart she went to meet him.

When she appeared like some flower upon the slopes of Libanus, her arms open and her lips ripe with promise, any sense of duty he owed to Rome vanished from the mind of Antony in a second. He saw only her, his idol! To follow her whither she chose to lead him, to share his triumphs with her, to add the kingdoms he had just conquered to her own, became his one and only thought. A squadron of ships was awaiting them at the mouth of the Orontes. They set sail for Alexandria.

For a Roman general not to bring back to Rome his spoils of victory was a thing that had never been seen before. For Rome alone was it their duty to fight, to overcome, to conquer. To Rome, and to her only, did the privilege appertain to confer the supreme reward—the triumph. But Antony no longer troubled about tradition. The East, with its kings prostrated before him, its incense and statues raised in his honour, had made him drunk. He felt himself a giant, and was soon to show it by one of those audacious acts whereby he flattered his pride. He decided that his return should be celebrated on the banks of the Nile with all the ceremony wherewith great conquerors were welcomed on the Tiber.

Egypt should not yield in magnificence to what was customary in Rome. Everyone wished to have their share in the triumph, for the insult offered to that proud city filled the hearts of the Alexandrians with joy. There was not a man who did not think it an honour to contribute to it by decorating his house, or by bringing some offering; nor a woman who missed donning her finest apparel and covering herself with all the jewels she possessed. A multi-coloured throng, they all poured

into the streets and massed themselves on the Field of Mars where the procession was to halt.

Suddenly there arose a loud rumbling sound as if the sea were approaching. A thousand trumpets blared forth, and in the midst of a cloud of dust the victorious army came into sight. The cavalry in their glittering cuirasses were leading ; then came the infantry, preceded by their standards, making the ground tremble beneath their regular march. After them came the chariots, heavy with precious metals, statues, spoils from the temples, thousands of captives doomed to await their fate in the depths of dungeons, and then King Artavastes, with his wife and two sons, their heads bowed low and their arms in chains of silver—vain symbol of their fallen greatness. Then last of all, standing upright in his chariot drawn by four foaming coursers, his brow girt with golden bay-leaves, superb in purple, and Olympian in mien, came the Emperor.

On a gorgeous platform, covered by an awning and surrounded by her children, Cleopatra was awaiting him. In the place of honour was her son Cæsarion, whose features more than ever recalled the divine Julius. Of all the solemnities in which Alexandria had rejoiced since the beginning of her reign none were comparable in distinction to what was taking place that day, and in none had the Queen participated with more pleasure. What could be more intoxicating to that proud nature who had ere now experienced the contempt of the Latin race, than to see this day its leading dignitaries passing by at the hem of her robe ? What a revenge to count by hundreds the eagles saluting her ! And with a view to accentuate her purpose to dethrone the god of the Capitol she wore the silver tiara of sacred Ureus, the special emblem of the divine Isis, in order to preside over the ceremony.

When the victorious general appeared before her she rose up, and advancing to the edge of the Tribune offered him a sceptre, in shape like a lotus and similar to her own,

thus associating him in the throne of Egypt. Antony was radiant. Standing up in his *quadriga* he proclaimed her Queen of Queens, Empress and Goddess, and confirmed her in the possession of the kingdoms he had already presented to her. Then turning to the children who were garbed in rich robes for the occasion, and wore diadems which weighed down their young heads, he assured the order of their succession. The eldest was to have Media, Armenia, and the country of the Parthians. To Helios were given the Libyan provinces. To Selene, his twin sister, Phœnicia with the Island of Cyprus. And Cæsarion, who was just fourteen years old, received the Roman purple and was once more declared the sole heir of Cæsar.

Hurrahs and long-continued acclamations broke forth as though from henceforth, with this group of prospective kings before them, Alexandria had really become the capital of the universe.

Night fell. The sun had sunk beneath the waves. From the port of Canopus to the outskirts of the Necropolis the houses were one by one becoming illuminated. The brilliant light of torches reddened the roofs of the temples. With a spasm of Titanic joy the festivities began. They were of all kinds, comprising free distribution of oil, wine, and corn, before which eager masses precipitated themselves; sesterces flung in handfuls for which everyone scrambled; and banquets served on enormous tables in the gardens of the palace. Public shows were in profusion; lofty or obscene, artistic or bloody, all had their admirers. As usual, the greater number thronged to the arena. Choice beasts were let loose. With a license not yet tolerated in Rome contests were permitted where athletes belonging to the aristocracy took the place of the gladiators. While these young men exposed their bare limbs with frenzied eagerness the spectators all rose, drunk with delight, holding their breath for the moment when blood should spurt forth.

In imitation of Roman custom these *fêtes* were prolonged continuously for forty days. On the first evening Antony and Cleopatra attended in their state robes, looking haughty and distant as became sovereigns. Mounted on two elephants from India decorated like altars, they presented themselves in every quarter of the city. But soon tiring of this ceremony, which cut them off from the merrymaking whose echo rose to their ears like an appeal, they descended to the pavement. And overcome by that fever for pleasure which in all *saturnalia* makes everyone level, and blends all in the same thirst for excitement, they mingled with the crowd. They laughed and joked with the people, sometimes even using coarse terms which came back to them from the days when once before their dignity had gone astray in the slums of Rhakotis.

On the last day, strong libations having fuddled Antony's brain, the idea came to him to wind up the festivities celebrating his triumph with a gigantic orgy, a masquerade, wherein, disguised as Silenus and accompanied by a troop of Bacchanals, he would perambulate the streets all night long.

Thanks to an amethyst ring, which it was said had been given to her by one of the necromancers, Cleopatra was able to keep her head steady through the worst excesses, and she seized the moment when Antony had lost all clear reason to add a further insult to all the others with which Rome had been defied during those days of folly. Mountebanks, eunuchs, actors, and some of the lowest scum that could be found, were placed upon curule chairs, and travestying a venerable Roman custom the Queen ordered all the Romans in Alexandria to march solemnly past this rabble.

The scandal was complete. When the report of it came to the ears of Octavius he felt his heart rejoicing. If he could not as yet distinguish clearly what the outcome of his own party would be, he began to see that

his rival was running the risk of losing the game. Patient and cunning, he repressed his desire to exploit these events at once for his own advantage. His natural timidity put him on his guard. This was not the time to measure himself against an adversary who in spite of his glaring faults still had faithful partisans. Before attacking so strong a party he felt the necessity of creating in his own favour a change of opinion which would modify the unfortunate impression his own youth had produced. An adept in the art of tacking, he made such a complete *volte-face* that we have still to ask ourselves which was the real man in him—the cruel, suspicious, treacherous tyrant he had been up till then, or the sober-minded prince, the friend of art and philosophy, the lover of clemency, for long years celebrated under the name of Augustus. That there was some duplicity in this metamorphosis there can be no doubt; but it is also possible that it corresponded to a sincere purpose which this clever man really evolved when he understood where his true interests lay.

Great was the general surprise. On his return from Sicily they looked for severe reprisals against the partisans of Pompeius, as had drenched Rome with blood on the morrow of Philippi. People were already mentioning the names of those who would figure on the lists of the proscribed. They saw instead a general amnesty, reconciliation, light fines, and useful measures passed in the interests of all classes. Was not this the surest means, short of declaring himself openly, of showing the contrast between his own wise discretion and the mad folly of Antony?

As though pursuing this ideal Octavius also took upon himself to restore the simplicity of earlier days. Mindful of the austere enactments of Cato he forbade the wearing of purple by ordinary citizens, reserving this privilege to Senators; he suppressed the meeting-places of money-changers; he gave his support to agriculture. In order to provide work for the proletariat he laid the

foundations of a Temple to Apollo on the Palatine Hill which, though not destined to be finished until later on, connected his name with a famous work of piety from that time onwards. A still more impressive act was his decision to depose Lepidus who was held in general contempt on account of the enormous exactions whereby he had enriched himself. This concentrating of the supreme power in the hands of two was well received. Men saw in it an omen of a not distant return to Republican unity, and the first stroke of the pickaxe which was to demolish the hated edifice of the Triumvirate.

In all these proceedings Octavius had been guided and assisted by his friends. In this he was admirably served by men whom the gods provide when they mark out for great things one who is not gifted in any exceptional degree. Of these friends three were to undertake on his behalf all the principal duties of government, and to raise him on the wings of their devotion to a height which he could never have attained by himself. These were Theodorus his former tutor, a man of common sense on whom he could wholly rely in any difficult undertaking; Agrippa, unequalled in questions connected with war, and a kind of Neptune who enjoyed the highest prestige on the seas; and above all Mæcenas, the wise and fascinating Mæcenas, of supple and subtle intelligence, whose counsels had that special gift of persuading his hearers that it was from them that the suggestion had come.

Octavius knew the value of their help in supplementing his own insufficiency, and undertook nothing without having recourse to it. On the morning when the detailed report of what had taken place at Alexandria arrived he summoned them. He consulted each of them individually as to what suitable response should be made to Antony's provocations, and when each one had given his advice it was found that they all three agreed. Antony certainly deserved to be anathematised, but his name, synonymous with glory, generosity and bravery,

enjoyed tremendous popularity ; to make a direct attack on this colossus would be a grave imprudence. But on the other hand, anyone who laid the blame on his accomplice would be sure of having popular opinion on their side. Feared as much as despised by all, Cleopatra bore the responsibility of the faults committed. Public report accused her of making Antony drink love philtres which led him on to madness. It was therefore decided that for the time being it was best to leave the figure of Antony in the shade, and to arouse public opinion against the woman whom the people in their hatred called "*The Sorceress of the Nile.*"

The habit of temporising embodied in his motto, "*Sat celeriter quidquid fiat satis bene,*" had up till now succeeded well with Octavius. He therefore took his time, and delayed unmasking his real adversary while he charged Theodorus to open a campaign of defamation against the Egyptian woman.

The Latin population was not difficult to stir up. Infatuated with their own capital it was sufficient to let them know that its supremacy was at stake. The suspicions haunting them seemed to become presentiments when they thought of what might happen. These proud citizens always imagined that every great city was envious of Rome and sought to rob her of her supremacy. In former days Carthage had drawn forth their suspicions, and since then Corinth, Athens and Capua had seemed formidable rivals. To-day all their defensive instincts were leagued against brilliant and renowned Alexandria. Without their knowing whence the report arose the rumour was going round that Cleopatra had vowed to transfer the government of the world to her own city. To dethrone Rome! This threat in itself was enough to make the Queen hated, but stories were added which brought her into further contempt. Her luxury, especially, could not fail to exasperate a people among whom want was being

severely felt. In its passage from mouth to mouth the story of the pearl was amplified. It was now the turn of her bath which they said was enriched every day with a mixture of gold and amber, thanks to which the skin of the "courtesan" acquired that warm colouring which attracted men's eyes.

While these stories obtained credence among the people, Mæcenas undertook to work upon the minds of the more cultured. The literary *élite* began to group themselves around him. With his adroitness of language and charming powers of persuasion, causing everyone to believe what he said, he depicted Octavius as their future master. From that moment it was an easy thing to turn their pens to his service. It became the *mot d'ordre* to bring conservative ideas into fashion, and devotion to the old religion, to strict morality and to all the views of which Cæsar's nephew had become the patron, in contradistinction to the Orientalism in which his colleague was steeped.

Virgil was the first to fulfil the wishes of Mæcenas with his delightful rural compositions. Under his gentle influence people felt a taste for rural life reviving in their minds, and a love of the soil to which the wars had dealt so severe a blow. Horace at the same time gave up his Epodes, in which up till then he had celebrated adventures of love, in order to rise to the graver tone of his Odes. Denouncing the fatal power of feminine domination he passed in review all the myths, all the noted examples wherein women had brought ill-fortune to nations, and in the name of their fatherland he inveighed against the Egyptian woman, designating her *illud monstrum* in his burning Muse.

The position of Octavius was improving, and he resolved to carry to the Senate the accusations he had not as yet dared to formulate in public. The Senate was the supreme arbiter, the tribunal before which every grievance concerning the State must be settled. To denounce his colleague before them was a perilous act,

for not only had Antony numerous partisans, but it so happened that Caius Sossius and Ahenobarbus, the two Consuls for that year, were his staunch friends. The counsellors of Octavius did not dissemble the risks they were running, but matters had reached a point when it was necessary to end the uncertainty, and for the two antagonists at last to measure themselves against each other in a duel to the death.

It was one of the last days of the year 33 B.C. The sun appeared and vanished behind fleecy clouds so that it was impossible to foretell whether the golden rays or drifting clouds would prevail. After scrutinising the sky for a long time Octavius declared that the flight of the birds was in his favour, and started forth.

The crowd was beginning to move about in the streets. He might have met bands of clients on their way to claim the *sportula*, or slaves returning with provisions, women pressing before the booths where beans, fish, and sausages were being sold, children almost naked and as brown as crickets, paddling in the gutter, groups of mules laden with osier baskets, and chariots and litters crowding the streets. But the twelve Lictors who went before Octavius cleared a passage through the most obtrusive; nevertheless, many who turned to look at him noticed that his countenance was paler than usual that morning.

In reality Octavius was nervous. When taking his seat on the Presidential chair he felt for the dagger which he had risked concealing beneath his toga. Since Cæsar's assassination a *Senatus Consultus* was forbidden to enter the chamber carrying any arms. But was not anything lawful to-day when he was opening a debate the course of which he could not foresee?

With a quick glance the two parties summed up their numbers; then laying before him a portfolio, swelled to bursting with incriminating documents, Octavius opened the debate. Faithful to the tactics which had succeeded with the people he launched his diatribe against Cleopatra.

"The incestuous daughter of the Lagides is our

worst enemy," he declared. "Threatened in her own kingdom by those who resent her disorderly morals and capricious rule, she maketh use of the power of Rome against them, while retaining her liberty to do us harm. Drunk with power doth she not dream of the downfall of the Capitol? To this end she maketh preparations, I assert, and hath in mind a descent upon Italy with her shameful horde of eunuchs and slaves."

The effect of these words was certain. A loud murmur greeted them. Wild with indignation the Senators rose to their feet, and with excited gestures waved their togas about like the wings of great birds which have been suddenly startled.

To make a direct attack upon Antony was difficult. Octavius felt the least false step would give him a fall from which he would not rise again. Trusting however to the reasoned arguments he had at his disposal, he began his accusation. He denounced Antony not only for having assigned to himself the recently conquered provinces, but for having awarded the greater portion of them to the Queen of Egypt.

"Yea, despoiling his own country, the lover of Cleopatra hath disposed of Armenia, Media, the territories of Chalcidia, Phoenicia with Tyre and Sidon, and all the immense revenues of Palestine, as a gift to this foreign woman." And between each name he paused, in order to allow time for protests to burst forth.

And these were loud and fierce.

"The wretch! The traitor! Our fairest provinces!" could be heard from one end of the Chamber to the other.

Up till now the staunch partisans of Antony had judged it prudent to keep quiet. When the first uproar had abated Caius Sossius demanded silence. He had an important communication to make. That very morning he had received an official document drawn up to refute the attacks with which the victor of the Parthians knew he was threatened. In eloquent terms, wherein the

exploits stood out so strongly that the mere mention of them sufficed to carry his hearers with him, the Consul recalled the brilliant services rendered by Antony. "And it is a man like that, the hero of so many victories whom thou dost vilify in his absence!"

"'Tis cowardly! 'Tis unworthy!" agreed some voices.

Encouraged by this support Sossius continued with more authority. What were these famous gifts to Alexandria if not disguised annexations? Since Egypt was a Roman province, or would become so to-morrow, what was there to dread? And inasmuch as the revenues from the East were serving to equip and feed the soldiers of the Republic, to build temples and barracks, making the name of Rome respected everywhere, could they be considered as lost, or only alienated?

And with a bow to the assembly the friend of Antony further added: "Out of respect for the rights of the Senate, the Imperator, through my intermediary, requesteth the ratification by you of the measures he hath taken in the belief that he was serving his country, or, should you deem them to have been injurious, that you nullify them."

This submission won many votes for Antony. They realised that if his love for Cleopatra had made him commit errors he was still, in spite of everything, the dominating figure of the last ten years, a great citizen, and the only one who had accomplished really great deeds.

Octavius felt the ground giving way beneath his feet. Pale as the statues surrounding the semi-circle of the Chamber, he asked himself if this first tilt would not leave him with his head rolling in the dust. But the portfolio under his hand was still swollen; he had not yet finished drawing forth its weapons. Regaining courage he read a letter in which were related the scandals that had taken place in Alexandria, reinforced by copious details of Antony's treachery. Stress was

laid on the investiture of the bastards, especially in regard to Cæsarion who had been treated as a Roman prince and had been presented publicly to the legions as the legitimate son of Cæsar.

To go back over the ground he had already won was to make a false step. Having no concern with dynastic questions how could the Republic take umbrage at pretended heirs? All that kind of thing they regarded as so much masquerading. That Antony should amuse himself with such play-acting was certainly to be regretted and lacked dignity. But had he not on former occasions taken part in such pranks when he harnessed lions to his chariot and indulged in similar eccentricities? On the part of a great boy like Antony all that was matter for laughter rather than for severe measures.

The current of opinion was again turning in his favour. Sossius profited at once to pounce upon his adversary by recalling to his hearers the crooked policy of Octavius on the morrow of Cæsar's death.

"Let us not go back upon the past," protested Tufius.

"I am coming to facts of even yesterday." And in rapid review the Consul showed how Octavius, by destroying the Triumvirate and changing it into a Dictatorship of two, had taken the share of Lepidus for himself. To seize the African provinces with their ships, cavalry, foot-soldiers, and all their prerogatives; to confiscate Sicily which had been won back from Sextus Pompeius, to his own use and enjoyment; to parcel out the finest lands in Italy among his own soldiers without reserving anything for the veterans of the other two armies—was not all this an offence to justice, and an overstepping of his powers far greater than anything Antony had done?

An uproar as loud as that which had greeted the revelations Octavius had made at the beginning showed that the Assembly had turned round. The sweat

stood out in beads on the forehead of Octavius. He felt for the sheath of his dagger pressing against his left side.

For a moment he thought they would drive him to use it, and with flaming eyes and clenched teeth he took up an attitude of defiance.

Someone accused him of aspiring to the supreme magistracy.

How was he to prove in an irrefutable manner that he was disinterested?

"I offer," he said, "to divest myself of all the offices which have been united betwixt my hands and to go back to private life, provided only that my colleague will do the same."

It was a skilful retort. Everyone was tired of dictatorships, and dreamed of a return to Republican government. But there were interests too serious at stake for any sudden decision to be taken. Besides, Octavius was mistrusted. His bad precedents cast a shadow around him. Some underhand cunning on his part might always be feared. By giving the impression of renouncing power he might be taking the opportunity of monopolising it.

Not knowing which side to take, the Consuls remarked that the absence of Antony rendered all measures nugatory. They must confer with him. Ahenobarbus proposed going to see him at Alexandria to obtain his resignation. The majority approved and the vote was deferred to a future sitting.

This situation left Octavius in great perplexity. He had just been made to feel once more that Antony's popularity was still deeply rooted. How long would it last? What efforts were needed to secure his triumph over a rival who had at his disposal not only a formidable army but riches upon which all were counting, and to which, when the right moment came, they would not fail to have recourse. As usual when any difficulty presented itself, he sought his friends.

Mæcenas occupied a sumptuous villa on the *Æsquiline*, from which the eye could enjoy in turn, by looking downwards or outwards into the distance, either the panorama of Rome majestically spread out on the banks of the river, or the vast expanse of country outlined by the Sabine mountains on the horizon. When he saw his master he went to meet him with outstretched hands testifying to that affection which was never to cool and which one even finds expressed in the little notes written by him to Octavius: "I love thee more than myself. Whither thou goest, I will follow. Whatsoever may befall thee, there will I be by thy side, for my life is linked indissolubly with thine."

They sat down not far from the brasier which diffused warmth mingled with incense through the vast *atrium*, and Octavius related what had just taken place in the *Curia*.

However much at a disadvantage the position of their party appeared at the moment, it was not to be considered as lost. The point of madness now reached by Antony would certainly lead him to commit some fresh folly which would give the opportunity for revenge. In the meanwhile, Mæcenas was of opinion that Agrippa should secretly prepare for war while Octavius undertook the task of conquering public opinion by useful measures in which he himself would endeavour to give every assistance. The traditionist movement was now clearly pronounced; they must foster it and use it as the rallying point against the Egyptian policy of Antony. The oldest temple in Rome, which had been raised in the time of Romulus in honour of Jupiter Feretrius, had just fallen to pieces; they decided that the Dictator should order it to be restored. They would also hasten on the completion of the Pantheon which had been consecrated by Cæsar to the glory of the god Mars.

While the two friends were thus planning the future together, Athenodorus arrived. His practical mind approved the resolutions just taken, and he added another,

namely, that they should think of the *plebs* who held in their hands the making of popularity. The lack of water was cruelly felt in Rome during the summer. Let the Marcian Aqueduct be repaired; let cheap baths be opened for the working people, which would afford them the same opportunity of refreshing themselves as Patricians enjoyed in their luxurious *sudatoria*.

This conciliatory policy was not displeasing to Octavius. The future was to prove that he preferred it to other methods, but the moment had not yet come for him to give it full effect. Hardly had he time to call together architects to study plans when a thunderbolt fell.

Antony had always kept up good relations with Octavia without Cleopatra having had any suspicion of it. In the bottom of his heart he was grateful to this excellent woman for the services she had rendered him, and what was a still more powerful consideration, he looked for more. They corresponded frequently. Owing to her position in Rome the sister of Octavius was able to give useful information to her husband on all that was going on. She was, in addition, the best of mediators, for her gentle hands were a guarantee for the preservation of the thread of relations between the two brothers-in-law, always so ready to break. In her beautiful house on the Palatine she continued to gather together the friends of the absent one, always speaking of him in the warmest terms, and keeping his place ever honoured. Her overflowing tenderness also devoted itself to the education, not only of her own children, but those of Antony by Fulvia.

By chance, or by one of those acts of treachery which swarm in those nests of intrigue, the palaces of kings, Cleopatra was placed in possession of a letter the Emperor had addressed to his Roman wife. The friendly tone of the letter, together with the promise it contained of an approaching visit, precipitated the crisis which was bound to come sooner or later. The arrow of jealousy

returned to strike into the heart of the Queen who was ever troubled by recollections of the past and fears for the future. "After what he promised me!" she thought. Then, in a reaction of her nervous organism which could not bear pain, she immediately added: "I will be avenged!"

By her side the gentle Charmion lived in constant dread. She feared and admired the passionate nature of the Queen which was always bordering on the dramatic. Had not an augur foretold that the amours of Antony and Cleopatra would end in bloodshed? Ah! If only she could have turned aside her dear mistress from a passion which was clouding her reason!

Falling at her feet, she leaned her head on her trembling knees.

"How thou dost suffer, beloved Queen!"

Cleopatra laid her hand on the bent shoulders and showed how she would like to lay hold of her rival, to make her expiate by a thousand tortures what she herself was enduring.

Charmion endeavoured to soothe her, but already the wound had become envenomed and the poison of hate was spreading through the veins of the impassioned woman. With an exaltation associating the whole universe in her desire for vengeance she vowed:

"Though I have to go to Rome to provoke them I will compel Octavius and his sister to war! And as for her, I am determined that she shall follow my chariot up the Capitol with her hands in chains!"

This extravagant dream made the Athenian woman tremble. In some confused fashion she caught a glimpse of the whirlwind in which everyone and everything would be caught up. She warned her, she implored her. Alas! What can wise reasoning do for a soul that is ablaze, which fears nought if only passion can be assuaged?

The afternoon was drawing to a close. The air, now less stifling, was bringing on its wings the scent of

magnolias. The light coming through the awnings had the delicate tint of the iris. It was the hour when Antony, fresh and perfumed after his customary *siesta*, left his apartments.

On a couch resting on four figures representing the Chimæra with outstretched claws, Cleopatra lay chafing at his delay in joining her. With her elbow on the cushions she supported her head as if it were too heavy and pained her. His advancing step made her tremble. She wore a dark and troubled look which betokened the approaching storm.

Besides, what hope could Antony have of avoiding it? The intercepted letter, with its leaves scored with writing, lay there on a round table of mother-of-pearl. He would have to answer for that letter, for the crime he had committed.

As soon as he came near the angry woman he was assailed with violent reproaches. Was he then a man who had no respect for his word? While she had been happy in the security of their union, and was waiting for the moment when its validity should be proclaimed, all the time he had been playing with her and was thinking of going away!

Antony's excuse was comprised in one word—policy. It was policy which obliged him to maintain relations with Rome. And what more useful intermediary could he have than the sister of Octavius? His political interests were watched over and safeguarded by her. By breaking with this ally would he not run the risk of provoking a war at a moment he had not chosen?

Cleopatra did not heed him. Her soul was burning for vengeance. Her only thought was to have done with this rival who once before had stolen Antony's heart from her and who, as the living symbol of his Roman fatherland, still possessed the means to dispute it with her. Nothing would make her draw back this time. She demanded of the husband of Octavia that he should break by an official repudiation the last links which

bound him to the West, that he should at last belong entirely to her.

Ahenobarbus had arrived shortly before, and had warned Antony of the active campaign being waged against him. Some friends, it was true, remained faithful to his cause. If the fulminations of the Senate had been recently turned aside it was due to their active intervention; but his partisans counted on his speedy return, and placed their confidence in his diplomacy. He must not deceive them. If he displeased public opinion by giving offence to the noble woman who had everyone on her side, and preferred the Egyptian, who would there be to defend him? Not only would the Patricians make part and parcel with Octavius and his sister, but even the populace, ever ready to be moved by tears, would range themselves on the side of the abandoned wife and children.

With a last glimmer of reason Antony saw the consequences of the act demanded of him by his warlike mistress. In trembling tones he endeavoured to stave off the catastrophe.

"Let us gain time. What demon of jealousy urgeth thee on? The portentous rupture thou desireth will change nought in our mutual relations. My entire life is thine and thine only. I have not a thought but to serve thee!"

But Cleopatra remained obdurate. With her long eyebrows curving like snakes, her rebellious red lips, her body curled up into a ball in the corner of the divan of which she seemed to be making a fortress, she presented an unyielding appearance.

"No!" she said, "I have had enough of hearing Octavia spoken of by the Romans as thy wife while I am treated as a concubine. By a solemn act I desire thee to declare to all the world that Cleopatra alone is thy wife."

This time the struggle was neither so long nor so sharp as it had been three years before when Antony

was still moved by the tender devotion of Octavia and sought to shield her from her first wounds. But now, far away as she was and vowed to sacrifice and arid virtue, she did not seem to him to claim the same amount of consideration. Was not the woman who deserved all he could give the beautiful passionate creature who aspired to monopolise him, to surround him with her insatiable love, and to make of him her other half? How could he resist a woman like that? She had brought him to that complete self-abdication which makes a man cease to be himself. His mind, as well as his senses, had been conquered. He made every submission. And when Cleopatra persuaded him that Octavia had always been her brother's ally while Antony had been their puppet, both at Tarentum and Rome, he no longer protested. His silence almost amounted to acquiescence.

This however was not enough. To satisfy the wishes of Cleopatra Antony must be brought to a frenzy of hatred scarcely possible as regarded the gentle creature who had loved him, who perhaps still loved him, and whose benevolence he had often experienced in spite of what people were saying. But the name of Octavius had on the contrary the power to arouse in his soul a flood of animosity. Passing over her own personal resentment therefore, the temptress put the hated name in the foreground, making it ring in his ears like a refrain. The wavering Octavius, racked with ambition, she represented as the *mischievous scamp* on the high road to seizing the first place.

"Wilt thou be content with our Oriental kingdom while *he* extendeth his rule from Illyria to the Pillars of Hercules?"

Antony turned pale. The vision of his colleague more powerful than himself and the ruler of territory more extensive than his own, was like cold steel passing through his heart. An antagonism like this could not possibly last. Twice already had the rivals been on the

point of flying at each other's throats, of rending and tearing each other, and twice had the hand of a gentle woman come between them. Again to-day the hand of a woman was thrust between them, but this time it was to incite to evil. How could war be avoided?

CHAPTER IX

ACTIUM

OCTAVIUS had come to visit his sister, as often happened. Although affectionate relations were still preserved between them their voices sometimes rose to a pitch which did not always give evidence of perfect agreement. It was always the same subject which was in dispute. While the one loaded Antony with reproaches the other always undertook his defence.

"Antony is not so blameworthy as thou dost pretend. I know well his real sentiments. He doth write to me. I know that Rome is ever dear to him, and he adoreth his children. Besides, we shall soon be seeing him again."

"How thou art under an illusion!" Octavius replied. "Dost thou forget, sister, in what unworthy manner he hath treated thee? Dost thou forget that he sent thee back from Athens like a servant, without honour, without an escort, without even the thanks which at least thy generosity merited?"

Octavia had forgotten none of these things, but she preserved deep down in her heart that indulgence which excuses everything rather than lose the man she loved.

Octavius however had come that day resolved to rid her of sentiments which were personally irksome to him. Previous to denouncing Antony publicly he thought it wise to first detach his wife by bringing accusations against him, and then to turn her into an ally against

the rival he wished to destroy. Was the unhappy woman aware to what shameful extent Antony was in subjection to the Egyptian? Supported by chapter and verse her torturer proceeded to enlighten her with a detailed account of the scandals at Alexandria. Ah! How had he the hideous courage to do it? How was it he was not disarmed before her sensitive face, which she turned away blushing under the pointed precision of those details which stung her as a swarm of venomous insects?

No, right down to the very roots of her heart he sought for the most vulnerable spots to pierce. Pitilessly he related how one day on the Field of Mars officers and men were assembled under arms for a review. The Emperor attended, with his baton surmounted by the golden eagle in his hand. Suddenly a messenger approached and spoke a few words to him. Straightway, without giving a thought to all the military pomp passing before him, he left precipitately to join Cleopatra who had summoned him without any other motive than a caprice to be obeyed by the man who had all those troops under his command. Another occasion was when he was presiding at the Pretorium. The Tetrarch of Judea was making a statement on some grave matters that were in litigation. Antony alone had the right to adjudicate, but he happened to hear the royal litter passing by, and immediately he was swept away by a gust of folly. Without listening to another word he left the court and was no more seen that day.

Octavius could have continued indefinitely in this strain, for a long list of misdoings, more or less authentic, illustrated this Egyptian romance.

His sister stopped him. Enough! She had heard too much. Antony it was true had grave faults, but he was her husband. She would only recognise *his* right to break the bonds which united them. So long as they lasted she would hold to her resolution to wait and to hope, for such was the law of her life. And though her

voice had a quiver in it the steadfastness of her look showed her to be unshaken.

Some days later the virtuous woman learned that Cleopatra's lover had repudiated her. Thus neither her generous-hearted goodness, nor the patience she had shown in bearing her injuries, nor that hope which is like a shield protecting the heart against the menaces of destiny, had prevented the fatal blow. Poor Octavia! The house which her marriage had made her own, the chamber wherein she had known happiness in the arms of Antony, the table he had enlivened with his hearty laugh, the garden wherein, side by side, they had breathed the delicious scents of summer—she must bid adieu to all these souvenirs, she must separate from them for ever. Her grief left her motionless, like an instrument the string of which is broken.

Octavius, who neglected no advantages in the game he was playing, and to whom each affront offered to his sister was like so much capital which must be made to give a large return, had called together the populace. Having been previously informed through his agents of the day and hour when Octavia was to leave the palace the crowd thronged all the approaches. When they saw her appearing in the midst of her children, her own as well as the son and daughter of Fulvia who had been entrusted to her care, a loud murmur arose. Her misfortunes aroused their indignation. Scurrilous epithets were hurled against the libertine who had deserted a wife of illustrious parentage and irreproachable virtue for the "Egyptian Sorceress."

Octavia silenced these cries. She would not have Antony's name reviled on her account. Desirous even of rallying support to his cause she held up her youngest child who was the very image of him. The unhappy woman hoped that they would still continue to love the father when they saw the fair innocence of the child!

The notification of divorce to the sister of Octavius was equivalent to a declaration of war. No one mis-

understood its meaning. In spite of the antipathy between their two natures, their rivalry, and the mutual deceptions they practised on each other, the gentle woman had been a powerful link between the two men. Through her influence people had looked for the maintenance of the equilibrium. Now, anything and everything might be feared. The mask had fallen in the violence of the shock ; their faces could be seen uncovered. Which of the two would be master ? Great uncertainty prevailed. Although the attainment of supreme power was the sole object of the quarrel, men pretended to think it was a clash of ideals. The resounding words "honour"—"patriotism"—"the return to Republican institutions"—were on everyone's lips. The difficulty of choosing between two competitors, who each claimed to be fighting in the name of their country, was indeed great. Did Octavius *lie* when he declared himself ready to lay down his unlawfully usurped powers ? Was Antony *sincere* in giving himself out as the champion of liberty ?

Just as during the great struggle between Cæsar and Pompey, the public became divided and each chose for their leader the man whom they considered it most in their interests to serve. The excitement was so great that even children took sides. Athenodorus tells a story of coming one day across two boys at fisticuffs. "What motive have you for misusing yourselves in this manner ?" he asked. "We are having a game," they replied. "*I am Octavius,*" said one, who had cunningly manœuvred his comrade to the edge of a ditch. "And *I am Antony !*" said the other, as he proudly lifted his small chin.

Although the divorce had produced a painful impression and had taken away many of Antony's partisans the whole of public opinion was not yet against him. His glorious past, his power and his wealth, made him an adversary always to be reckoned with, and one to whom it was inadvisable to give battle except upon

ground which had not been prepared for defence. To ruin his reputation and hold him up as the slave of the Queen of Egypt were the tactics, as we have seen, adopted by Octavius. But however patient he had vowed himself to be he had just come to the point of asking how long this underground policy like a mole was to last, when the gods who were turning to his side in no uncertain fashion, sent him an unexpected collaborator. Munacius Plancus, the same man, described in a former chapter, who had taken the part of Glaucus, swathing himself in green silk and crowned with reeds ; and " the man of all work," as Cleopatra had contemptuously called him, had just arrived in Rome.

Whether out of revenge for wounded pride, or skilful to recognise which way the wind was blowing, this despicable individual had suddenly left his companions of yesterday in order to bring back tales of them which would procure him a ready welcome in Roman society. But this kind of success was not enough to satisfy for long a man as needy as he was vile. Deeming that treachery might prove lucrative, he sought out Octavius, and under promise of reward revealed to him the existence of a document of great importance. It was the will that Antony had drawn up, when starting on his Persian campaign, in which he had made Cleopatra his sole heir, leaving to her and her children the whole empire of the East ; and, true till death in his love, had commanded in this will that wherever he might die his body should be brought back to his beloved one. Although Plancus had not the document in his possession, having placed it in the keeping of the Vestals, a mission he had faithfully carried out three years previously, he retained every detail of it in his memory and was able to reconstruct it almost word for word.

Now the question of burial was a very serious matter with the Romans. Everyone had it much at heart to rest near his own kith and kin, in earth consecrated by his ancestors, where one day he would be joined by his

children. The thought of being left on foreign soil, if they should happen to die abroad, would fill soldiers with apprehension, and those who came from families in comfortable circumstances would not fail to leave behind instructions that their remains were to be taken back to Italy. Of all the follies into which love had led Antony, that of wishing to be buried in Egypt was certainly one of the most serious he had committed ; in any case it was one which would strike public opinion to his greatest disadvantage. By means of this sacrilegious document Octavius was certain of provoking the censure of the Senate and of thereby obtaining an adverse vote against its author. The difficulty was how to get hold of it.

A graceful imitation of the Temple of Delphi, that of Vesta, was situated on the outskirts of the Forum at the foot of the Palatine Hill. In order to reach it the Dictator had only to cross the Sacred Way. Accompanied by an escort, and preceded by *lictors* shedding around him all the glittering emblems of authority, he started off. On arriving at the gate he signed to them all to wait, and in his imposing robes of purple crossed the venerated threshold alone.

The Priestesses of Vesta lived under the shadow of the altar. They were daughters of noble families who entered when quite young. They were clad in white, looking like lilies with their hair covered under a veil, and they held a strict and proud view of their charge. Not only must the sacred fire of the goddess be ever kept alight, not only did they guard the *Palladium*, the relic saved from flaming Troy, but such was the consideration in which they were held that generals, Proconsuls and Pontiffs, when their duties called them away from Rome, were accustomed to confide to these pious guardians the keeping of any objects too precious to be entrusted to the hazards of a journey. Where indeed could these treasures have remained in greater safety than in a spot where, deep down in their hearts,

was inscribed the motto : " Better to die than to break one's oath " ?

The moment they learned what it was that Octavius required of them these valiant virgins were filled with noble indignation. " What ! Give up something that had been confided to them ! Deceive the trust that had been placed in their word ! And what of their honour ! "

Their crafty visitor urged that the fate of the country was at stake, and that scruples were vain in such a case. But indifferent to everything except their sacred charge, the Vestals remained inflexible. Only force should tear from them what they had sworn to guard.

Octavius was concerned. His character did not lend itself to the use of the strong hand, and he feared moreover that this abuse of power would be severely condemned. At certain times, however, necessity demands it, and, though it were a crime, the prize this time was worth the risk. The lictors waiting at the gate of the temple received their orders. The sound of blows from their axes arose, and the coffer wherein lay the depositions of the warrior gave up its secret.

When it was read in the Senate the testament produced the effect which Octavius had foreseen. It was a triumph for his own side. Antony's friends looked at each other in consternation. Renounce his country to the point of not even desiring to leave his bones there ! Had he then in very truth ceased to be a Roman ?

The procedure of Octavius remained nevertheless inadmissible. Caius Sossius pointed out the indignity of which he had been guilty. A will was sacred. No one had the right to call a man to account while he was alive for what was to be executed after his death, and in no case was this lawful since a cancellation was always possible.

Some of the Senators, respectful of tradition, ranged themselves on this side, and blamed the violence which had been offered to the Vestals. The fact nevertheless

remained, and many were staggered by the blow they had just received.

Now was the moment to charge home. Octavius recalled the old grievances. He insisted on the undeniable proof they had just had. He had other provocatives yet in store. One of the surest means of transforming into pitiless judges the rich Patricians who sat in the Curia was to excite their rivalry over objects of art for which they had a passion. He represented Antony as a collector for the Queen of Egypt, taking away the rarest treasures from Greece and Asia in order to offer them to her. Was not the famous golden statue of Diana Artemis, which had been the glory of Ephesus, now adorning the portico of Bruchium? Had not the two hundred thousand volumes from the library of Pergamos, destined to enrich Rome, been transported to Alexandria?

Loud murmurs arose from the benches round the semi-circle of the Chamber; their faces wore an angry expression. Each of these men, whose dwelling overflowed with books, valuable furniture and beautiful marbles collected during his travels or while exercising his magisterial office in fair countries, was indignant as though this were an unheard of license.

With hypocritical fury they demanded that they should pass on at once to the vote. The urns went round, and, scorned and declared unworthy, Antony was deprived of all the functions which had been entrusted to him by the Republic.

Complete as was this victory it was not enough for Octavius. Assemblies, as he knew, sometimes change their minds, quickly and completely. What this clever tactician wanted was to deal his colleague such a blow as would leave him for ever *hors de combat*. A military defeat was the only thing from which he could feel certain that the victor of the Parthians would never recover. But how to bring his compatriots to fight against him? They were weary of civil wars, and it

would certainly be a most unpopular one which would have Mark Antony for their adversary—the only really great citizen since Cæsar to raise the Roman eagle over new territories.

The same subterfuge which had already succeeded was once again to serve Octavius under his adroit manipulation. A few days later he made a speech in which he cunningly kept Antony outside the debate, avoiding even the mention of his name, which was always susceptible of arousing sympathy, and made an attack upon the enemy about whom there could be no difference of opinion, the woman against whom public sentiment was always ready to be aroused. The old story of Cleopatra's ambition and the purpose she always cherished of coming to attack Rome had lost nothing of its force. To mention it was a sure means to tighten the strings of their patriotism and carry them to extremes. In an instant the whole Assembly were on their feet hurling maledictions against the Egyptian.

War was at last declared. Faithful to the custom consecrated by their ancestors, Octavius proceeded to the space beyond the Pomerium, where the temple of Bellona arose. Ancient, august and gleaming, the granite building cut the blue sky. Amid the frenzied acclamations of the crowd the Dictator hurled a golden javelin, the point of which stuck in the pedestal where rested the feet of the goddess. This ceremony, which placed the army under her divine protection, proclaimed at the same time the lawfulness of the campaign to be undertaken.

In appearance the war was directed against a foreign enemy, but who could misunderstand it? Antony would become the shield of Cleopatra, and on both sides Roman blood would redden the battlefield.

Antony, however, had not waited for the challenge of Rome. Good soldier that he was he had determined to be beforehand so as to take the offensive. Sixteen

legions under the command of Canidius were despatched to the shores of Asia Minor, and he himself made ready to join them.

Here was an occasion to give the lie to the allegations of Octavius and re-establish his popularity by leaving his mistress behind, and presenting himself alone at the head of his troops. They would then have seen clearly whom they were fighting.

When this was explained to Cleopatra she objected. The ever present recollections of the past made her obdurate. She was too wide awake to throw her lover a second time into the network of Roman intrigue. With his changeable temperament, of which he had so often given proof, Antony was a man who must be kept within sight and held under her constant spell. No, she would not leave him. Whithersoever he went she would cling to his footsteps and would refuse to allow him to undertake any enterprise over which she had not the supervision.

Vainly did the Emperor represent the embarrassment which the presence of women would cause in a camp. Vainly did Ahenobarbus rage against it declaring with his customary roughness that if they were going to encumber themselves with the *impedimenta* of a court he would prefer to retire. But Cleopatra held to her resolve against everyone.

"Whoever will, let him go," she answered the malcontents. "Nought shall separate me from Antony."

Probably a secret understanding between them authorised her to speak in this manner. In any case she acted with the undisputed authority of one who was providing the principal means. Was not her own inexhaustible treasury to supply the expenses of the war? Was it not *her* fleet—two hundred strong, well armed, well furnished ships—which would bar the way to the enemy in the waters of the Mediterranean?

However this may be, it was her decision that carried the day, and in the early days of spring the enamoured

pair started out on the last stages of their destiny on the galley *Antoniade* which was decorated and tricked out as though for a *fête*.

Never had the treacherous sea been calmer. The light blue sky blended with it in a delicious softness of bluish grey. As the sun was setting amber coloured ripples passed over it and mingled with the broad stretch of crimson. The sound of the wind in the sails harmonised with the strains of flute and lyre amid the echo of songs sweet and low. Nights of love succeeded joyous banquets, and no one suspected that breaking loose of the elements towards which the frail bark was advancing.

This was only the prelude. At Samos, where they touched, and at Ephesus, where they established their residence, the two lovers renewed the magnificent display of Alexandria. The ancient Asiatic city, though accustomed to luxury, had never before seen such prodigality. Day by day processions of kings wearing crowns and clad in embroidered robes brought to Antony their tribute of soldiers, horses and supplies. Desirous that these vassals, on their return to their own provinces, should take back a high opinion of their suzerains, Cleopatra did her best to dazzle them. Each fresh arrival served as a pretext for more gorgeous scenes. Show succeeded show, and princes who had come from afar to do battle were surprised to see men sheathed in armour, brazen chariots, and deadly engines of war which filled the camp with their bulk, mingling side by side with troupes of comedians, tight-rope walkers and jugglers whom they scarce expected to find in such a place.

And thus, when the whole world was bending beneath the effort of assembling armed forces, when whole hosts of human beings were about to go forward to death, when the fate of empires was at stake, Antony's mistress adopted this strange way of showing her belief in a victorious issue, her superiority to the course of events.

Antony was far from sharing this confidence. He was fifty years old ; the time for mad enterprises was over, and he was fully aware of the difficulties of his position. But between his companions in arms, who were urging him to go to Italy and give battle there before Octavius had time to concentrate his troops, and the fair enchantress who only counselled delay, he knew not which side to heed. To play a successful game a cool head was necessary, and with this he had never been gifted. Under the excitement in which she made him live, and the demands exacted by her jealous despotism, Cleopatra deprived him of the little he possessed.

His generals did the rest. Firmly persuaded that their Emperor would never lead them to the end they had in view, so long as he submitted to any other influence than their own, they joined forces to drive away the baleful woman. As usual, it was Ahenobarbus who took the initiative, for he was the most courageous of them all and, having never asked a favour of Cleopatra, was the more free to oppose her. Being sufficiently aware of the value of his services he was at no pains to beat about the bush, and declared in concise terms that the disorder introduced by the presence of a court in close proximity with an army was greater than he had foreseen ; besides, the Queen's place was at Alexandria where her presence was required by her ministers.

Perhaps Antony was not far from sharing this opinion. But what could he do against a lover who responded to every serious suggestion by entwining her arms around his neck, by kisses, and tears ?

Less than ever was Cleopatra disposed to go away and expose Antony to the harsh words of those stern-faced Romans she saw mounting guard over him. Plagued by their insistence would he always be able to refuse the reconciliation with Octavius which she knew so many desired ? But to stay on and continue to play the part of a warlike Egeria she must look about for support. By bestowing favours and promising more to come she

won over Canidius, the general who had most influence over Antony's mind.

When called upon to give his opinion Canidius opposed the view advanced by Ahenobarbus. According to his opinion it was neither just nor good policy to separate from an ally who was providing not only considerable assistance in money, but in men and ships as well. And like the courtier he added : " That he could not see how the counsels of a great sovereign, who was as noble and brave as she was beautiful, could do harm to an army whose courage her presence exalted."

Those who held the contrary view however would not allow themselves to be beaten. One of the most convinced among them was Quintus Dellius, for more than any other he was compromised on the side of Antony. This old political stager did not take long to see clearly the game of the Egyptian, and was alarmed that it was in such complete disagreement with his own and that of his compatriots.

Determined to extricate his chief from the evil pass in which he saw him involved he approached him, and in plain language dared to say :

" Cleopatra leadeth us to disaster."

Choking with indignation that anyone should dare to accuse the woman who possessed his entire trust and whose sagacity he admired, he burst out :

" What dost thou allege ? On what grounds hast thou the authority to speak thus ? "

He had his reasons ready. They poured forth pell-mell only to resolve themselves into the one which embodied them all.

" I allege that the daughter of the Lagides doth not bring, and cannot bring to this war the same mind that we Romans possess."

" Cleopatra's interests are mine own," Antony proudly answered.

This error had to be combated.

" Undeceive thyself," Dellius said. " Cleopatra is

Queen of Egypt. Provided that her crown be safe, provided that she preserveth her Eastern hegemony and the commerce which filleth her coffers with gold . . . ”

A gesture from Antony having cut him short the wary Dellius thought that while disquieting the Imperator it would be politic to reassure the lover.

“Cleopatra loveth thee,” he averred. “Thy person is dear to her above all the world ; but can she have thy greatness at heart to the same extent as we thy friends, the defenders of thy cause, we who have left all to follow thee ? If thou dost relinquish thy sovereign power what will be our fate ? Ruined, hunted down, compelled to flee from the reprisals of Octavius, where shall we find refuge if it be not in exile ? ”

The Imperator paced his tent with long strides. He breathed heavily as when an emotion stronger than ourselves overcomes us. Possibly he had already had a glimpse of these palpitating truths without having put them into words. Now that he had heard them, the desire to see clearly right to the bottom arose.

“Speak ! ” he said. “What are thy reasons for thinking that the Queen hath renounced her ambition to climb the steps of the Capitol by my side ? ”

“The counsel that she giveth thee.”

“Dost thou know it then ? ”

Without allowing himself to be discouraged Dellius reminded him how many times the Queen had opposed their giving battle. Quite recently again at Corcyra and at Leucadia, nay wherever circumstances might have favoured them, she had brought forward pretexts for deferring action, and he concluded by saying :

“One might think that a victory, which would make thee master of Rome, is feared by Cleopatra more than a defeat.”

Antony signed to his lieutenant to leave him.

He required to be alone. Badly lighted by a smoking lamp his tent was in semi-darkness. He fell back on the bed covered with a lion's skin. The weather was stormy.

The earth seemed to be trembling, and unusual sounds filled the air. It was as though everything to which his mind was most firmly attached had suddenly received a shock and was whirling round him. "Could it be really true," he asked himself, "that Cleopatra no longer desireth the highest rank for me?"

As a matter of fact Cleopatra had never ceased to wish victory for her lover, but, as Dellius had well divined, not in the way the Romans conceived it. While they were urging on the Emperor to fight to a finish in their eagerness to recover their own Lares and Penates and to obtain lucrative positions for themselves, her mind was bent on retaining him. Whether it be that she had lost confidence in his warlike qualities, which she herself had contributed to enfeeble, and that by putting all to the proof she foresaw the possibility of losing everything, even the inheritance of her forefathers, or whether she feared a complete triumph which would take Antony back to Rome, she had given up her boundless ambitions and was now contenting herself with a policy of division. If only the empire of the East, together with Antony, could be assured to her, she would gladly abandon Italy with the barbarian provinces, Gaul, Spain, and Mauretania, to Octavius, to the Republic, or to anybody who wanted them. In short, an unexpected *volte-face* confronted them, and she, who had unchained the war, was doing her best to stop it half-way. Was it caprice, or mere in-consequence?

In order to explain these variations in Cleopatra we must follow her back step by step and see the influences which had agitated her unsteady soul from the commencement of her life. As the youthful mistress of Cæsar, a man fifty years old, she had only thought of getting all she could from that powerful protector and of obtaining first of all the restoration of her throne and afterwards sovereign power. The meeting at Tarsus with Antony had made a different woman of her. With the coming of that bold descendant of Hercules passion had

entered into her life, and the axis of her being had become displaced. A craving for tender experiences had taken the place of the keen pursuit of ambition. Jealousy and hatred had directed her actions and on these the peace of the world had hung.

If she had only kept the practical head of her younger days she would have left the conqueror of the Parthians to his grandiose enterprises, and perhaps in that case their names, interwoven together, would have been inscribed in the Pantheon of history in place of that of Octavius. But as we have seen, it was love that ruled her life to-day. An eternal uneasiness aroused troubled reflections in the soul of the mistress. "If Antony should enter Rome in triumph what will become of me?" she asked herself. "Should I again, as sixteen years ago, have to strive with that people, that aristocracy who hate me? What Cæsar had not time to accomplish would my lover, who is growing old and whose weakness I know, would he dare? Could he moreover? Bound by so many interests would he belong to himself? Would he possess the authority to impose upon them the chosen wife of his heart, the foreign woman whom the voice of his gods and his people reject?"

Her line of conduct was marked out from that moment. She would systematically keep Antony away from Italy, she would oppose all decisive action and little by little she would lead him on to a naval battle from which, in case of defeat, he would always be able to take flight to Egypt.

Conscious of the indecisions and disputes that were troubling the strategy of the Emperor the minds of those surrounding him became uneasy. They no longer felt that confidence, which on the eve of a battle is like some strong draught intoxicating those who are exposed to death.

Seeing him so wholly under the artifices of the Egyptian woman, his generals began to distrust him, and asked themselves if there was not some secret

understanding between them to betray them. The idea of a plot against him took shape. Since their chief refused to raise up again the glorious dust of Pharsalia and Philippi, since he allowed himself to be turned from the purpose for which they were risking everything, let someone else take his place, let some true Roman assume the command.

By common consent they offered it to Ahenobarbus.

The great soldier had fallen ill from worry and disgust. When his comrades came they found him stretched on a hard layer of palm leaves which served for a bed. His teeth were chattering from the fever. At their first words he turned his head away and said :

"I will not hearken to you."

"Hast thou then no faith in our victory ? " asked Dellius.

Yes he had ; his old warlike heart still remained strong. He knew that the legions, tired out with constant orders holding back their impetuosity, only asked to draw the sword. Led by him what prodigies of valour would not these brave men accomplish ? But to put himself at their head he would have to betray Antony, his brother-in-arms, the dear friend of his youth, the Imperator in whom his faith was bound up.

Seated by his bed Dellius sought to persuade him.

"If thou dost refuse what will become of us ? The Egyptian woman will destroy us. Leave us not to perish."

With his burning hand shaking under the feverish pulsation of the veins, Ahenobarbus took that of his visitor.

"Leave me to slumber. I will give thee my reply to-morrow."

Before dawn the next day a vessel was making sail for the Peloponnese. Ahenobarbus explained the reasons for his departure in a letter left on the table. All that his eyes beheld made him exasperated and sad. He preferred to retire rather than remain inactive or take the place of Antony.

This defection was keenly felt by his companions who had placed their trust in him. They waited all day thinking he would regret his decision. When evening came their eyes were still searching the horizon.

On the following day, being convinced that their worthiest comrade-in-arms would not come back, Dellius and Amyntas decided to join him.

When he learned that three of his generals had deserted him the sweat broke out on Antony's temples and his limbs became unsteady. He had to lean against the wall for support to prevent himself from falling.

"The best of them!" he said, and two tears fell from his eyes.

He knew however how to control himself before others, and in order that their example might not be imitated he caused to be spread about a false rumour concerning the runaways. According to his story all three of them were dissolute fellows who could not do any longer without their mistresses and had gone to join them.

Nevertheless fresh cases of desertion occurred. It became like an epidemic which was spreading.

After a scene in which Cleopatra reproached Fortunius with being one of those who had spoken against her to Antony, he too resolved to leave that hot-bed of hatred and intrigue which the general headquarters had become. His baggage was packed and he was making for the vessel, which had already been prepared for sailing on the following night, when he was denounced and before he had got near the shore was arrested and forthwith put to death.

On the slightest indication of disaffection other executions followed, putting terror into the camp.

Antony was no longer the same man. He had completely lost that joviality which is like an omen of good fortune. To-day the least *contretemps* was enough to upset him. A storm had broken out at sea and he thought the ships, which had preceded him in the gulf of Ambracia, must be lost. A prey to a kind of vertigo,

he went so far as to suspect the devotion of his surest friends. Even Caius Sossius, who had given so many proofs of friendship, was accused of having voluntarily surrendered to the enemy a detachment of troops in the defiles of Epirus.

Like all his contemporaries Antony believed in warnings. They made a considerable impression on his mind. The will of the gods seemed thereby to be revealed to him. He never failed to put his right shoe on before the left. He kept silent when in darkness. He at once left any assembly if he heard the sound of a mouse. Before starting on any undertaking he consulted the augurs and never came to a decision before they pronounced the encouraging words: "Go, the blood of the victims speaketh in thy favour."

During the summer he had spent at Athens in the year 31 B.C., when everyone was bubbling over with excitement like water in a cauldron, lightning struck and overturned a statue which the people had raised in his honour. So great was his fright that to revive him before the doctors arrived it was necessary for his faithful Eros to rub his body with a mixture of warm oil and cinnamon.

During the last days of the month of August this depressing state of melancholy increased. While the inevitable day was coming nearer he became gloomy and listless instead of feeling that state of high exhilaration which on the eve of battle had formerly made him like a god of lightning. It might be said that all the muscles of his body had suddenly collapsed. For hours together he would be seen motionless as if the slightest effort had become too much for him.

One morning however he rose up from his torpor to proceed on board the *Antoniate* to inspect the fleet which lay broadside on in the bay of Actium. It was there that Octavius was waiting for him with his two hundred and fifty triremes armed with rams, and his hundred swift Liburnian craft. Antony's fleet was far more considerable. Well rigged and provided with formidable

engines of war he should have been confident. For a moment he was so, when his lieutenant Alexas observed that swallows had made a nest in the rigging—an excellent omen. His face became radiant and he began to make jests.

“Before the passing of the moon the miserable galleys of Octavius will have scuttled off before us, like a pack of greyhounds!” he said.

His soldiers at last recognised their Emperor of old. They made him an ovation. But on the following day other swallows happened to come and these killed the first arrivals and massacred their young. No portent could have been of more ill repute than that.

Cleopatra did not share the superstitions of her lover, for, being a real Greek in her mind, she was penetrated with philosophy. To assure the success of one's actions by taking human measures seemed to her more important than paying attention to the blood of victims. She had moreover that confidence in destiny possessed by beautiful women who think they have only to will a thing for the higher powers to range themselves under their decrees, in the same way as men do. Measures were therefore taken to provide for the carrying out of the plan she had conceived.

For several days the two armies had been facing each other. Both sides hesitated. Confident in the efficiency of the crews who had been trained by Agrippa, Octavius endeavoured to draw on his enemy to a naval battle. Troubled and undecided, Antony could not make up his mind. To his military genius the sea was new ground, which had never as yet given him a victory, and his officers were persisting that he should give his preference to *terra firma*, on Macedonian soil of glorious memory.

The other side however won the day, for that had been Cleopatra's decision. She knew that the results of engagements at sea were rarely decisive, and that in any case a retreat would be easier. We cannot maintain that she desired a retreat, or that she preferred it

to a victory ; the consequences would have been too hazardous ; but the precautions she took are proof that the Queen foresaw its probability. If she had not had this presentiment, why should she have echeloned those relays between Greece and Egypt ? Why should she have despatched beforehand to a safe distance the ships laden with gold coin, bullion, and precious stones, from which she never separated ? Why, above all, on the very eve of the battle did she order the great sails to be kept ready, rolled up at the step of the masts, like slumbering magicians capable of waking to life when the order to retreat should sound ?

Thus everything had been foreseen and prepared. All was ready. Naught remained but to assure herself of that most uncertain and fragile thing—the heart of a man.

Certainly the bonds attaching Antony to his mistress—bonds of the flesh which time had rendered more enduring day by day—were of those which do not break. Many times had she taken the opportunity of testing their strength. Latterly, especially, the desire to have her adorable presence always by his side had grown into an obsession. The more uneasy he became and the more he felt the threatenings of coming disaster, the greater was his need of her. Cleopatra was nevertheless alarmed. Could one ever be sure to what the intoxication of victory, or the despair of a lost cause might lead a chief ? At times he was so yielding, she reflected, that this great colossus was like a child.

The lovers passed the evening before the decisive day on board the *Antoníade*. It was the last day of August, and all the glory of summer seemed to be concentrated in its splendour. Around them the ships of the Egyptian fleet, armoured with brass, like floating fortresses with their towers of stonework, were riding at anchor. The deep well of the sky, shot with countless sparkling stars, was watching unmoved the events that were preparing. For one long moment they remained motionless, without

speaking. The sound of the rippling water ascended to them. It was a continuous sound, prolonging itself into the infinite, and seemed to carry away their thoughts before they had time to formulate them into words.

At last Antony sighed and said :

"What will to-morrow be ?"

Turning towards him, Cleopatra showed her face, radiant with emotion.

"Whate'er befall, do we not possess that invincible force of being united ?"

With a simultaneous movement their hands sought each other in the darkness, and the emotion they both felt was transmitted from the one to the other.

"Yes, our destinies are irrevocably linked together," he said. Then after a little hesitation, he added : "But if some mischance . . . war hath many . . . projectiles will rain . . ."

She had apprehended many things that might happen, but not this one, not a chance shot which might kill her lover.

She trembled at the idea of losing him. Her passionate gaze enwrapped him.

"Antony ! My well beloved ! Knowest thou not that I am forearmed against the horror of surviving thee ? If thou shouldst die the dagger which I keep concealed under my girdle would quickly end my existence."

He swayed under a wild gust of passion and in a transport of emotion pressed her to his heart and kissed her hair and her lips.

"I love thee. I love thee," he kept on repeating as though to protect her.

Leaning on his shoulder she said in a calm and gentle voice :

"And if *I* were struck down, what wouldst *thou* do ?"

"Thou struck down ! *Thou* ! But that is not possible. Have we not agreed that thou wilt be apart on board the *Antoniade*, out of reach of the battle ?"

She remained thoughtful.

"Can one ever tell? We might become separated."

Any separation between them but that of death he could not imagine. Without his beloved one, how could he live? Without her voice, her gaze! No! No! Never! If she concealed her dagger, he also had his sword.

Gently she brought him back to less tragic realities.

"It is not only death," she went on; "other events, and circumstances we cannot foresee, may separate us from each other."

The lofty heights of passion were lighted up in Antony's soul; he was not to come down from them again.

"Wheresoe'er thou art, I will find means to rejoin thee," he declared.

"Dost thou swear it?"

"I do swear."

At last she had won the promise for which her whole being had been yearning. Now the worst might happen. She knew that on a signal from her the submissive lover would obey. They had each given their word. Nothing, now remained but to throw the dice of fate. They listened in silence as though to catch some sign. Nothing, nothing, but the monotonous music of the waves lapping the hull.

The stars soon began to pale. A rosy tint began to gild the jagged summit of Mount Othrys. Stirred by the first breeze of September, which had just sprung up, the tall masts with their tapering points seemed to be tracing mysterious figures in the sky. It was daybreak. They must part.

"Adieu, my love! Adieu! Till this evening!" they said; and each went to the post where the final preparations called them.

An hour later, as he was passing along the mole, Antony was accosted by a centurion who bore the scars of many past wounds.

"What wouldst thou?" he asked good naturedly.

"O my Emperor, dost thou then mistrust us, or our swords, or our lances, that thou dost put thy hope in these rotten planks?" the man replied, pointing to the ships. "I do implore thee to leave the Egyptians and Phœnicians to splash about in the sea, as is their calling, and entrust thy fortunes only to us, thy veteran soldiers, who on land know but to conquer or to die."

More moved than he cared to show, Antony struck the fine old soldier on the shoulder with a friendly hand, and then passed on without replying.

It is said that at the same hour Octavius accosted a mule-driver and asked him his name.

"Fortunatus," he replied briskly; "and my beast is called Victory."

The coincidence is at least singular.

Everything has been told, suggested, contested, and re-told, concerning the battle of Actium. Whatever explanation is adopted, that famous day will remain an enigma, and the psychology of the woman responsible for the defeat will always defy our understanding.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon. Since early morning the fierce shock of encounter had kept the two fleets at grips with each other. While brazen trumpets blared across the roadstead, the galleys, like monsters, rushed on each other. Lead, arrows, and balls of burning resin clove the air. With their pointed rams the ships of Octavius fell upon the Egyptian mastodons. The latter responded from their lofty towers by casting grappling irons which bit into the enemy with their sharp teeth. The fury of battle raged on both sides, and deadly blows were dealt. At one moment one could see their limbs springing forward, and the next, their faces were but bleeding masks. Who could have said at that hour which of those powerful fighting machines would gain the day? Virgil relates that they were as huge as the Cyclopes themselves

floating on the surface of the water, or like a swiftly-moving swarm, stinging, harassing, receding, and coming back again to the charge.

A sudden movement took shape. A quick thrust broke through the centre. It was the *Antonade* making full speed for the open sea, followed by the royal fleet.

Upon what incomprehensible initiative was the Queen acting? Why was she giving up the fight before anything had been lost, or even compromised? Many have wished to see in this the carrying out of a plan preconcerted with Antony. But what would have been their object in acknowledging themselves defeated before they were? No, Antony had nothing to do with this premature flight. He was the first to show surprise, nay more, he was utterly confounded. What then was afoot? Treason on the part of Cleopatra? Not quite that. If for reasons, which we think we have disentangled, she did not wish for the complete victory of Antony; if she behaved in such a way as to render it impossible, it could not have been because she preferred Octavius to win. Was he not her personal enemy? Was he not the avenger of Octavia and the representative of the Roman people, from whom she had everything to fear? In face of these singular contradictions we must confess that human actions do not always correspond to inflexible logic, especially a woman's logic.

From early morning Cleopatra had been witnessing an appalling spectacle. The rude alternatives before her had overwrought her nerves. Unutterable horrors were taking place beneath her eyes. On a sudden, the wing protecting her was seen to open out. The danger of being surrounded, taken prisoner and separated from Antony, threatened her. She was seized with fear. Her assailants were quite close. All of a sudden she became distracted. She pictured herself as lost and in the hands of her formidable enemy. Standing on the foot-bridge, like some bird in alarm, she looked around seeking the direction of the wind. It was blowing from the North in

her favour. She took flight. Was she thinking of Antony? Did she say to herself: "If I flee, he is doomed?" No, for she knew he had promised to follow her and that was enough for her *heart*.

Alas, her predictions concerning him were only too true! At first, on seeing the galleys making for the open he could not conceive what had happened and thought some mistake had occurred. He said to himself: "What is this? Some feint or ruse? Their prows will turn round and the battle will be renewed more fiercely than ever." All at once the truth broke upon him. It was his beloved one in flight. . . . A kind of mist then came over his reason. All other thoughts left his brain. Cleopatra alone filled and held it under a spell. His movements were no longer under his control. Forgetting who he was and what was expected of him, without a thought for those who were continuing to fight bravely in his cause, he quitted his post. A trireme was lying hard by, ready prepared, as it seemed. He threw himself into it and followed the woman who had led him to his ruin.

It was now evening. A heavy silence lay over the blood-stained water. The *Antoniade* had stopped. From the poop Cleopatra, with beating heart, was watching, since it was life or death which had to be decided.

At last the light from a lantern came in sight, and a vessel drew nigh. Antony got down from it, but in such a state it was hard to recognise him. His head was bowed, and on his shoulders seemed to be the weight of the world. Without raising his eyes he crossed the gangway accompanied by Eros, and went to the end of the ship. He threw himself on a bench and with his head between his hands sat brooding, as a man lost at the bottom of an abyss. What had he done? What power stronger than himself had brought him there? Such conduct on the part of a soldier, as he had just been guilty of was so strange that he doubted whether he

was really himself. And every moment he kept on asking whether he was a hero or a coward. Ah, how he was suffering! The man of countless triumphs to be there, praying the night to hide him! What misfortune ever equalled his?

Supported on the arms of Iras and Charmion, who were preventing her from collapsing, Cleopatra gazed at the unhappy man. His aspect was so forbidding that she dared not approach him. This then was the result of all her manoeuvring! And swiftly she discovered the enormous, the irreparable error which love had caused her to commit. If she had loved Antony less, or even more; if, from the commencement of this unfortunate campaign she had left him to act in accordance with his military genius, he would not have been to-day the desperate man he was, with his head bowed in the hollow of his hands. What had she done? Why had she led him on to this battle from which all his friends had dissuaded him? Why, above all, had she fled? . . .

She herself was unable to explain this flight, so speedily had it been put into execution, so irresistible the impulse. She questioned herself. She searched that inner sanctuary of the soul into which a lie never enters. Her conscience made answer that if she had doubted Antony, would she have left him? No, she acknowledged that without that solemn pledge of the night before, and the certainty that wheresoever fate would lead her there would her lover join her again, she would have shown more courage in the face of danger, more constancy in prolonging the fight. She had only given ground because her surety in his pledge had urged her on, and her selfish certainty had told her that once back in Egypt she would have regained him for ever. And now, at the sight of that broken man who had no more regard for her the full extent of her madness came clearly before her. Oh, that she could ever have thought that an Antony could go on living after he had lost his honour!

With her cheeks drenched with tears she turned to Charmion :

" Thinkest thou that he will forgive me ? "

Terror-stricken with all that she had been witnessing since the morning, the Athenian girl was still trembling. The bloody scenes had frozen her heart. Although her terror was somewhat relieved when the Queen had taken flight she felt that the greatest misfortune of all was now upon them. All she could say in reply was :

" Antony is a ruined man ! "

But Iras, who was younger and had more confidence in the power of love, found words of encouragement :

" Go to him, Madam, see how he suffereth ! Thy presence will hearten him. "

Cleopatra made a few steps forward. But Eros warned his master. And he, clinging to despair as his redemption, made a sign that she should not advance ; he wanted to remain alone.

For three nights and three days he remained in the same spot, without losing the power to suffer. All his limbs seemed dead. He refused food, and heeded not the thirst which was parching his tongue, but all the time his mind was awake to torture him.

His faithful servant, who was well aware of the anguish of humiliation under which he was bowed down, said to him :

" Dost thou then wish to destroy thy life which is so dear to us ? "

" My life is no longer worth living, " answered Antony. " Glory was the only value I placed on it. I am now like to a man who hath been stripped and left naked on the road. "

" But all is not lost. Thy friends . . . "

" I have no longer any friends. Which of them doth a man keep in adversity ? No doubt foreseeing my defeat, those on whom I counted the most deserted me before the hour. "

Crouching down before Antony whom he had always regarded as a god, Eros embraced his knees.

"There are others who will remain faithful to thee. I know of some who would shed without hesitation the last drop of their blood to save thee."

"*Thou* wouldst, I know well, my poor Eros. But it is not *thy* blood I have need of. I require a promise of thee."

An affectionate and submissive look questioned him.

"Swear to me that thou wilt put an end to my life the moment I give thee the order."

Jumping up with the shock of what he had just heard the servant protested.

"I will never swear to that."

Antony turned away from him.

"Go! Speak no more of thy devotion!"

It was a cruel taunt to the man who had just offered to give his life for him, and would have given it without any regrets. With a stifled sob he protested,

"My sword, my hands, my life, all are thine, O my master. But the oath which thou dost ask of me, even could I bring myself to hold to it, this hand would fail me and, despite myself, the weapon in it would seek to pierce mine own heart rather than thine."

Still keeping away from him Cleopatra bewailed her grief, sometimes burning with fever, sometimes chill as ice. Was Antony going to let himself die? Had he no more love for her? She thought of the time when she had merely to call and he would hasten forward and press her passionately to his heart. How many notes during these last three days had she not sent him without his even taking the trouble to open them! And she felt the hideous remorse of having herself destroyed his fair destiny.

Suffering however has its limits. The hour must come when the utmost point of sorrow has been reached. Passion is the stronger, however shameful and guilty we may be. Lips must once more seek each other, tears must cease to flow.

When brought together again the lovers remained for

a long time side by side without daring to look at each other. Silence served them instead of speech. They told many things to each other thus which no words could have expressed. Had they any need of speech to know that all their dreams were shattered, that one fatal moment had sufficed to bring defeat to them both?

Stronger however than their anguish, stronger than the mortification of having their limitless pride brought so low, was the intoxication of finding themselves together again. With that frenzy of the senses which sometimes destroys the soul, but more often exalts it and carries it to the furthest extremes, they strained each other in their arms.

"Forgive me! I love thee!" implored the erring woman, half choking.

Antony held her in his arms. Delivered for a moment from the remorse which was to poison the rest of his days, he leaned his burning face on the fair bosom on which he had abandoned everything. Was not a kiss from Cleopatra worth kingdoms?

CHAPTER X

DEATH

THEY were back again in Alexandria. Deceived by the messengers, which from fear of an insurrection the Queen had sent on before, the people had welcomed them as conquerors. From end to end of the city garlands ran along the houses. Palms were waved and arches of flowers made a triumphal route as they passed by.

Brief were these rejoicings. When they learned what a veritable rout the battle of Actium had been their joy changed into stupefaction. The defeat had been no less on land. Every day witnesses were landing at the port, bringing further details. First they heard of the surrender of the legions under Canidius, almost without striking a blow, then that of the Oriental rulers, who one after the other detached themselves from a lost cause and sought by gifts and servility to win the good graces of their new master. Then the whole of Italy, ranging herself against the man who had been her idol, and infuriated over her misplaced devotion, had consigned him to the *Gemonia*.

During the first few weeks Antony had managed to preserve a few illusions. With the troops that still remained faithful to him and had rallied a little here and there, he imagined he would be able to save, if not the vast empire his victories had won, at least what belonged to Cleopatra. When he heard that his Arcamian army had taken flight, and that of Cyrenaica, the strongest rampart

of Egypt, had gone over to Octavius; when news was brought of the treason of his lieutenant Alexas, who owed him everything, and that of Herod, the Idumean, whom he had made king of the Jews and had loaded with favours, a feeling that the end of the world had come invaded his soul. This then was what men were! In the days of his prosperity he had only seen servile faces and did not know that other countenance which treachery had revealed. Finding it so ugly he turned away and fell into an access of insupportable misanthropy. Vainly going back over the past he accused himself, and deplored the mistakes he had made. He reproached himself for having had too much confidence and for having under estimated the strength of his adversary.

Thoughts of Cleopatra mingled with his remorse and anguish. With that appalling clearness of vision which succeeds a catastrophe, she now appeared to him in a form which had hitherto been hidden from his dazzled eyes. All the faults she had made him commit rose up from afar like phantoms. And how ready she seemed to seek relief, to amuse herself, to build up schemes on the morrow of all this ruin!

Cleopatra indeed was not the woman to give up. Whatever weakness she may have displayed at the crucial moment, her energy had prodigious resources in itself. When she seemed to herself and to others to have gone under, some unexpected power bore her up to the surface again. Her passionate zest for life carried her irresistibly on to the future, whatever her mortifications had been.

In the state of dejection into which he had fallen this easy-going disposition irritated Antony. He could not understand it. The contrast to his own feelings soon came to exasperate him. Ah! How could he have allowed himself to be guided by a woman like that! What magic stronger than his own will had drawn him to follow her? Seeing her only as the cause of his misfortune he would have liked to take flight. Several times he prepared to go, but always at the last moment her beauti-

ful, cool, perfumed arms were entwined around his neck and he found himself a captive again.

One day, however, during one of their frequent quarrels, she had reproached him more sharply than usual for his inertia, and his pride rose up. He had had enough chiding from the woman who had ruined him. Since his own will was not strong enough he would set up a wall between them. An old tower of the time of the Pharaohs stood on the edge of the river. In memory of Timon of Athens he called it his *Timonium* and there he shut himself up with the intention of finishing the rest of his days in retreat.

Accustomed to the sudden changes of a temperament which always leaped to extremes, Cleopatra was not seriously alarmed. "Antony transformed into a morose philosopher! What next!" she said with a pretty pout of incredulity. "I will not give him a fortnight before he is at my feet again!"

Meanwhile, what was she to do? Her bold and fertile imagination worked hard. She reflected that if evil fortune willed that the victor of Actium should one day be master of Egypt, then she must find means to escape him. The far away Indies offered their civilisation of thousands of years. Travellers had brought back tales full of wonder. If she and Antony were driven to seek a place of refuge let it at least be in that land of sunshine and happiness, where delicious visions enchanted the air, where flowers exhaled perfumes that sent one to sleep, where constellations more brilliant than Orion, Cygnus, and Cassiopeia, were reflected in the limpid waters like a mirror. How were they to get there? It was useless to think of the long route by the Mediterranean and the Pillars of Hercules, where Roman sentinels kept guard. But the Red Sea was over yonder, further on Gidda, and then the Ganges. The only thing to be done was to transport the fleet over the Isthmus of Suez and embark with all the treasure she could get together.

A romantic flight such as this could not fail to attract a spirit as venturesome as that of Cleopatra. What is a

long stride of three hundred *stadia* to anyone who is threatened with servitude? And she threw herself heart and soul into the enterprise. An army of workmen was despatched to Pelusium. Enormous structures on wheels were built, like those which in former days transported the blocks to build the Pyramids, and oxen were harnessed to them.

Matters were going well. Already several ships had crossed the sandy desert and were floating in the waters of the Arabian Gulf, when the agents of Octavius arrived—an event she had not counted upon. Treachery had been at work. All was destroyed or given over to pillage. What could not be carried away was sent to the bottom of the sea.

This check was a cruel blow to Cleopatra. Had she then ceased to be that privileged being before whom the elements bowed as her subjects? A feeling came over her that from henceforth whatever she might take in hand ill fortune would lay hold of it and would no more let it go.

Her character however was not one to give in. Since flight was impossible she would organise resistance. With renewed energy she raised an army of young troops, equipped new galleys and negotiated fresh alliances. Alexandria was placed in a state of defence. In order to inspire the inhabitants in the defence of their city she had Cæsarion enrolled in the army.

Standing in his stirrups in the armour he had put on for the first time, Cæsar's son, made equally to attract and to command, recalled in a surprising manner what his father had been.

In a clear voice he cried out :

"Citizens, soldiers, your future king will fight in your midst. Together we will draw our swords against the usurper of Cæsar's name!"

Acclamations broke forth.

"Octavius shall never enter here," yelled forth a thousand voices as sonorous as clashing cymbals.

Cleopatra alighted from the litter from which she had witnessed this scene. Many of those who had acclaimed her son prostrated themselves before her, for whether in the helmet and accoutrements of a man which she wore when in camp, or whether shrouded in the veil of Isis, her beauty always inspired adoration.

When Antony heard of these proofs of devotion which the Queen was still receiving, he was ashamed of his inactivity. Besides, he could do without her no longer. Although his feelings towards her were at times more like hatred than love, she was necessary to his existence.

One day when his heart was heavier than usual he said to himself: "How could I ever have believed that I could bear to be deprived of her presence?" And repentant, he left his sterile retreat which had failed to bring peace to his soul.

Cleopatra was expecting him. She was sure that the man who had quitted his post in battle to follow her would not for long be able to harden his heart to solitude.

She received him with open arms.

"Come! We have never had greater need of each other."

It was true. The only thing was to be together in their misfortune. But their love had been wounded for all time. All that had happened had put a shadow between them that was not to pass away. Spurred on by the vehemence of their natures they began again the quarrels and recriminations which had led to their separation.

Antony, especially, was not skilful in concealing his bitter feelings. Every moment of the day he made allusion to Actium, the dishonour of which he felt like the brand of a hot iron upon him. At times they almost seemed like enemies. At others, their common sufferings would draw these two unhappy beings together, and they would feel themselves indestructibly bound to one another. The hot breath of their complicity passed over

them, and they experienced the irresistible need to melt into one burning ember.

In an attempt to return to happier times they called in the friends of former days. They again formed another set from those who had been their former companions in pleasure, not less extravagant than the *Inimitabiles*, but under a changed name, that of *Synapothanumenæ* (inseparable in death), which sufficiently reveals the mind of the two lovers. They understood each other. They knew to which divinity their libations were henceforth consecrated. Their companions knew it also. None the less, these banquets, presided over by the idea of approaching death, yielded in no respects to the splendid feasts of former days. Must they not rise above the ordinary? Having taken up their stand to submit to no degraded destiny, must they not show that they knew how to enjoy the days remaining to them?

Suicide was a virtue among the ancients—the supreme act imposed by misfortune. When life had ceased to be the distaff from which Clotho spun golden days with silken thread, they simply put an end to it as something that had no more use. In order to effect his own exit Antony had the means possessed by the soldier—his sword—which no more than that of a Cato or a Brutus would fail him the moment he judged that his side had definitely lost.

Death for Cleopatra was a more difficult thing. For one who had walked only on paths strewn with flowers when youth still held her in its bewitching arms, the last step was a hard one to take. To die would be a small matter; but how to ensure that the sense of harmony in which she had passed her life would not be disturbed? How avoid that her charming features, her body bathed in perfumes, and her skin accustomed only to the most delicate touches, should not receive some marring effect? With the mind of an artist desirous of preserving her own personality through the ages to come, and aspiring to

make an apotheosis of her end, Cleopatra had long reflected on this matter. The art of poisoning had engaged her attention for many years. When it was a question of punishing a conspirator, or ridding herself of some felonious minister, even of a husband (as was said), she had recourse to it in preference to steel which left incriminating marks. The way in which these poisons acted was a matter of indifference to her. What mattered to her their agony when an enemy was being put out of the way? But desirous as she now was of going deeper into the matter she summoned the celebrated Olympos, one of her physicians.

Versed in all the branches of his art this learned man had travelled in Assyria to study the effect produced by certain plants—such as henbane and belladonna—which bring death or healing, according to the amount taken.

Taking him into her confidence, the Queen said :

“Thy fortune is made if thou canst procure me the means of quitting this life without pain, and without the purity of my features being marred.”

Olympos remained deep in thought. What the Queen asked surpassed his ability. Nevertheless he would make experiments. A body of physicians was convoked, and in their trailing robes covered with cabalistic signs like his own, they entered together upon their labours. From a mysterious laboratory, fitted up for them in a retired corner of the palace, ruddy gleams rose up in the evening, and the odours escaping were bitter and nauseating.

Soon their experiments began. They were performed on criminals condemned to death. The first tests were terrifying. Compelled to drink the deadly liquid, the unfortunate men writhed in agony, their shrivelled limbs beat the air, their distorted faces became green, and a whistling sound came from their throats. And all this suffering lasted a long . . . long . . . time.

Fresh experiments gave more speedy results. The patients still experienced a burning sensation, but the

end was more rapid and they succumbed as though asphyxiated.

The Queen encouraged them to make still further trials. "Your reward shall be proportionate to your degree of success."

One morning Olympus presented himself. His eyes were sparkling under his bushy eye-brows. At last he had found what was required.

Accompanied by her two waiting-maids, who had devotedly sworn to die with her and by the same mode of death, Cleopatra descended to the depths of the dungeon where the executions were taking place. She would judge with her own eyes.

A low door opened, and two colossal Ethiopians brought in a manacled slave who had struck his master. He was a man in his full vigour of life. He made an attempt at resistance, but in spite of his struggles his head was held back and from a horn cup held to his mouth the liquid trickled down his throat. The effect was almost instantaneous ; a few convulsive starts and then a collapse. The man sank back in the arms supporting him ; he was dead.

A shudder froze the blood of Cleopatra. Rapid as the scene had been it had left a horrible impression. Iras had not been able to bear it ; she was carried out in a dead faint.

"Hast thou found nothing more merciful ? " asked Charmion whom fear had also turned white.

"Not in the vegetable kingdom," said Olympus. "But there is the poison from serpents. Thou shalt see."

At the same moment the door gave passage to a woman. She had been condemned to death for killing her child. Her face was beautiful and was rendered more touching by her tears. Falling at the feet of the Queen she implored that she might be spared. The Ethiopians drew back.

"Have no fear, thou shalt suffer no hurt," said Olympus.

But she continued her supplication for pardon.

"My life! I want to live," she implored.

Then all at once, silence! The injection had been accomplished without her having perceived it. Her eye-lids closed; a kind of drowsiness came over her limbs. One would have said that the young woman was sleeping. Her heart had ceased to beat. Little by little her face grew cold, but preserved all its charm.

And thus life might cease without pain, just as when one goes to sleep. Cleopatra's mind was henceforth easy. Her means of deliverance had been found. Never should the victor of Actium take possession of her alive.

The final catastrophe, however, was approaching with long strides. Pelusium had been taken and razed to the ground. The armies of Octavius were encamped under the walls of Parætonium. What was to be done in this extremity? Antony conceived the idea of the Paladins—that of challenging his enemy to single combat—two hundred years before it took shape. Ah, if only he could end this affair in the lists, and show before the eyes of his lady and the two armies the valour of a hero!

Alas! This gesture of bravado and chivalry was in vain. It found no echo. Now that Octavius was sure of victory without running any risk, coward as he was to boot, why should he expose himself to the chance of a deadly blow?

"Go back and tell thy master that Antony will not find lacking other ways of meeting death," he replied to the officer who had brought the challenge.

Before entering upon the struggle which would decide the fate of Egypt, Antony endeavoured to save Cleopatra's throne by a generous holocaust although it cost him much to beg anything of a rival who had just retorted with such insolence. He offered to live with her as a simple citizen, unarmed and without any title, provided that she be confirmed in her throne.

Octavius did not even deign to reply.

Many points however were engaging his attention. Traitors and spies, as we have seen, were not lacking in Alexandria. From them he learnt that the Queen was experimenting with poisons, and that before dying she had resolved to set fire to all her immense possessions. Now Octavius was set on obtaining these possessions. The person of Cleopatra, whom he destined to be the most brilliant trophy in his triumph, was no less precious to him. How was he to prevent this twofold treasure from escaping him? An adept in making calculations he reflected that women, though arrogant under success are rarely so in face of adversity, and that doubtless fear, or the hope of still being able in some measure to retrieve the situation, would make his fair enemy conciliatory. To dupe her was everything.

It was therefore with her, and her alone, that Octavius consented to negotiate. An official ambassador presented himself at Bruchium with orders to represent him as inexorable; at the same time Thyreus, a secret agent, cunningly insinuated to the Queen that a reconciliation was by no means impossible. Octavius had also told him to hint that he was sensible of her charms, as were all the leading Romans, and that far from wishing to treat her cruelly he only craved permission to present his homage to her.

It is rare that a woman fails to believe assurances of this sort. Cleopatra, whose life had been passed in the atmosphere of a goddess, and who had breathed on her throne only flattery and incense, might easily believe herself to be still an object of adoration. She might possibly have allowed herself to be taken in by this mirage if a brutal condition had not opened her eyes to its deception. It was nothing less than to hand over Antony.

In truth, Octavius wanted to be rid of him. This great defeated rival was in his way. He could not chain a Roman general to his chariot like an Artavastes or a Vercingetorix. Besides, although his sword was broken,

this fiery warrior might still dispute every inch of ground and retard his definite victory, and the Dictator was anxious to end the matter quickly and return to enjoy his triumph in Rome.

Unfortunate Cleopatra! Was it necessary that her enemy should *despise* her that he could offer her such a bargain! Although her sentiments towards Antony were no longer what they had been; although the fugitive of Actium, and the hermit of the Timonium, had shown a feebleness of character which a woman's passion can rarely brook, she trembled with indignation at the very thought of the crime demanded of her. Too skilful however not to take advantage of the favourable disposition shown towards herself, she too entered into the game of trickery, and without discouraging the negotiator requested time for reflection.

As we have already said, spies thronged the ante-chambers of Bruchium. Among them were men—doubtless in the pay of Octavius—who told Antony that his enemy was compassing his death, and that Cleopatra had given her promise to Thyreus to bring this about.

Whereupon he was seized with an access of tempestuous passion. Betrayed! Sold by a woman for whom he had sacrificed everything! Antony thought of taking vengeance on her. Should he kill her? But that was like piercing his own heart. Should he kill himself? No, not that, for his rival was lying in wait. And jealousy undermined and consumed him. Like his great ancestor Hercules, he wore the shirt of Nessus. Oh, what unparalleled torture to love and yet to see his worst enemy in the creature he adored!

The unhappy man's suspicions reached such a point that, from fear of being poisoned, he refused to touch any dishes which Cleopatra had not first of all tasted.

Justly angered by such outrageous distrust she determined to inflict a lesson on the ungrateful man who so misunderstood her.

It was just at the end of supper. She had sub-

missively fulfilled the exigencies of the new régime which required her to drink and eat first. As a final libation she half emptied a cup sparkling with white wine. She wore a rose in her hair. She took it out and dipped it in the wine. Then turning to Antony she said :

" Wilt thou drink to our love out of this cup after me ? "

He accepted and was in the act of raising the goblet to his lips.

Cleopatra stopped him with a peremptory gesture.

" See now, unhappy man, the emptiness of thy suspicions. If I had the hideous intention thou dost ascribe to me, acknowledge that opportunities are not wanting for carrying it out. That flower thou didst not suspect was impregnated with poison ! "

Confused and not daring to raise his eyes, Antony fell at her feet. Would she ever forgive him ? The little time left to him to live would not suffice to expiate the wrong he had done her.

Little did he know how truly he had spoken. One day only separated him from his last, when all would have been said. On that day at least he would accomplish prodigies. It was the awakening of the lion. His brilliant fighting instincts were to cast one last gleam and show what a hero he might have been if he had only been left to follow his own genius.

The army of the enemy was only a few *stadia* from Alexandria. A hostile population, already given over to treachery, were hesitating about defending it. The Emperor got together the few troops who had throughout remained faithful and fell upon the cavalry of Octavius in a surprise attack from which they had no time to recover. Defeated and pursued they crossed the Nile in confusion and regained their former entrenchments.

Alexandria was safe for that day.

Drunk with a happiness he had no longer expected, Antony kept on shouting : " Victory ! Victory ! " Yes,

in a last farewell victory had come back to him; it had placed one more crown upon the brow of that master in warfare.

How could Cleopatra not feel extinct fires rekindling within her? She had again found her Antony, intrepid and beautiful as in the days of their youth. The moment he came in sight surrounded by the captured standards she left the window from which she had been watching and ran to meet him.

In a like transport of joy he dismounted from his horse and hurried towards her, and those two beings, whom the bitterness of misfortune had separated, once more found their own true element in glory. They again knew one another and, clasped in each other's arms, forgot all the sufferings which had clouded their happiness.

That night rejoicings on a great scale once more lighted up the palace of the Lagides. A rain of gold descended on the soldiers who had shown most valour. One of them even received from the Queen's own hand a suit of armour on which was blazoned the sparrow-hawk of the Ptolemies. Sistra and panpipes resounded. National songs were sung. One might have thought that the times when the Imperator was distributing provinces had returned.

However, as if they felt a presentiment that their hours were numbered, the lovers were loth to give up a single one to slumber. The night was soft and clear, one of those Eastern nights which weigh heavy on the heart because it feels so feeble as compared with their immensity.

Passing from *parterre* to *parterre* they gained the extremity of the gardens where Cleopatra had previously seen Antony going away for the first time. The water was beating loudly against the parapet. Resting their elbows on it they listened to the rhythmic sound, so like the beating of their own hearts. To their right was the lighthouse, seven stories high, seeming to challenge the stars. Lower down on the horizon the crescent moon was

shining, and its silvery reflection fell on the sea as though strewing it with petals.

This enchanting scene carried their thoughts back to the past. With no need for words they lived over again the past moments of their wonderful happiness. Minute little details, even about the most trivial things, came back and lighted their memory ; but it was especially those first days at Tarsus, fragrant with their youth, which enchanted them most. At that time, did they not believe they were setting out on a voyage which was to be undisturbed by storms ?

"Dost thou remember the first evening ?"

"Yes, thy robe was of the colour of sea-weed. Doves were flitting around."

And that day at Antioch, when at last they had found each other again ! This memory was not without its clouds, but they both agreed that the most intense moments are those when there is something to be forgiven. The present overwhelmed them in this respect. They were like people who have had to traverse wide spaces to find each other again. The certainty they now possessed of henceforth loving one another unto death threw into the background all the artifices, angry feelings, suspicions, and barriers they had raised between each other in their unhappy moments.

The orange trees were shedding around them their nuptial fragrance. It seemed as though they were beginning again a new existence.

"I love thee ! I love thee !" they said alternately over and over again without wearying, as though these words were the refrain and never-ending echo of their souls.

The wind was rising. The colour of the sky was changing. It was assuming a leaden hue. A vast shroud seemed to have suddenly spread over the water.

In sudden fear, Cleopatra shrunk close to the breast of Antony. She was trembling all over.

"Art thou cold ?" he asked.

"Yes! No! I know not. Darkness seemeth to have entered into my soul."

He laughed at the idea. Usually more quick than she to be discouraged, and more inclined to deceive himself, he attributed an undue importance to the skirmish of the day before.

"Fear nothing," he reassured her. "I feel myself strong. Fortune hath returned to us!"

Hardly had he uttered these assurances when over their heads a hoarse croaking was heard. Ravens were of evil omen. It was now Antony's turn to grow pale. He looked out towards the horizon. The breaking day enabled him to distinguish the ships massed in the roadstead facing them, like a mass of sea monsters. He recognised the same swift vessels, the same Liburnian craft which had faced him at Actium. His trembling hand sought Cleopatra's.

Pressing close to each other, like children frightened in the night, they took the path back. The marble steps were just beginning to be outlined in their whiteness between the dark masses of yew-trees. Slowly they climbed them, as though they were experiencing great fatigue. On the last terrace they stopped. The moment of parting had never before seemed so grave. Nevertheless it had to be. That day was not to return. Their lips met.

"Farewell! Farewell!" they repeated, as at each step they turned round to look at each other.

And their voices grew feebler until at last they were lost in space.

Put upon his guard by the check he had received the day before, Octavius also had not slept that night. In vehement language he rated his troops, and sharply reproached them for having allowed themselves to be routed by a few squadrons.

"And that too," he added, "when you were at the very gates of Alexandria, and were just about to lay

your hands upon booty which would have sufficed to buy each one of you an estate out of your own share."

Nothing more was required to stimulate their courage. At the same time emissaries sowed corruption throughout Antony's camp. The soldiers who persisted in their fidelity were warned that they would have the reprisals of Rome to fear; the others were promised an amnesty.

It was under conditions such as these that the battle began.

The hope which Antony had regained was not long in sinking away. After the first shock he saw an empty space forming round him. Seized with panic the fine fellows of the day before had changed into runaways, and among them, by a cruel irony, he recognised the hero upon whose shoulders Cleopatra had buckled the golden breastplate. To think that the world could be fashioned to his measure and could witness such a scene!

In despair the Emperor threw away his shield. With bared breast he exposed it to blows. Ah, if only one would deliver him! But his hour had not yet come. The right to die is only ours after the last effort has been made. He must first stop the rout. And on his own shoulders he laid this titanic task. He was everywhere. To right and left his great frowning gesticulations could be seen. With the flat of his sword he threatened and struck. In strident tones he poured out abuse.

"Traitors! Miserable curs, who at the first sign change your masters!" But who listened to these vain imprecations? The confusion was becoming general. It was a question now of who could first reach the city. Octavius passed at a gallop with loosened rein. All the legions followed him.

One last hope still remained—the fleet! Alas! there too treachery had corrupted all. The crews stubbornly refused to fight. With oars held aloft they welcomed as brothers their enemies of yesterday.

All was lost. Further heroic efforts would have been



The Death of Mark Antony
(From an old engraving)

useless. All they could do was to go down into the abyss which had opened before them. Antony knew this. His head was burning. His arteries were beating like hammers. He flew forward as one demented. Only raised fists and curses met him as he passed. Instinct however led him on. He was in front of Bruchium. Inexpressible confusion littered the approaches. With heart bursting he shouted out :

"The Queen ! Where is the Queen ? "

An agonising silence made answer. The sharp arrows of presentiment were all at once pointed to his heart.

"Cleopatra ! Cleopatra ! " he shouted.

He was heard. An officer came forth from the royal apartments. His face was downcast. At once the lover understood before even he had reached him.

"Dead ? "

"Aye, with thy name on her lips."

At the first moment these terrible words did not convey their full meaning. Dead ! She who had filled the whole universe ! Dead ! She who had been the brightness of the day ! Can the earth and the sky perish ? Nevertheless, the hideous truth little by little began to dawn upon him. Antony understood that he would never again see Cleopatra. It was as though he had received the order, as if he heard the hour strike for the *rendez-vous*. He returned to his tent.

During this day of cowardice and treachery Eros had not quitted his master's side. Many times had his strong arm warded off blows aimed at him. He had given him drink when he saw him staggering. Now that they were alone their tears flowed freely.

The first to overcome his emotion, it was Antony who spoke :

"Come, Eros, the moment hath arrived. The Queen hath given the example. Draw thy sword. I know now how misfortune doth expiate its defeat."

The slave turned his head away. His arm refused to obey.

"My lord, ask not of me the impossible. Thou, from whom but now I turned aside the darts of the enemy, wouldst thou have . . ."

"Dost thou then prefer to see me dishonoured and covered with ignominy?"

No! Eros was not to see that. Bravely he seized the hilt of his sword. After making the blade whirl round his head so rapidly that it described an aureole around him, he threw himself upon it and with outstretched arms fell on his face at his master's feet.

Tears coursed down Antony's hollow cheeks.

"Brave Eros! Thou hast shown me the manner," and he likewise struck in his turn.

The blow, alas! had not the sureness of that of his slave. Antony still breathed. He called out.

The soldiers of his guard ran up.

"Finish me," he commanded. "End the torment I endure."

But no one found the courage to lift a hand against the majesty of that body which had once been so resplendent in its glory.

Cleopatra, however, was not dead. When she learnt that the army of Octavius was marching on Alexandria without encountering any resistance she had only one thought—to escape from the invader. The mausoleum, where her treasures lay, offered a safe retreat. It was there she resolved to die.

When she found herself behind the grating and separated from the world outside a great shudder froze her. Had the moment come? There could be no doubt. What was she waiting for? The last hand in the game had been played and lost. She could only look forward to a worse fate befalling her. Slavery and captivity reared up their dreary menace. Nevertheless, she hesitated. What caused this hesitation? The image of Antony rose up before her. Defeated, overwhelmed and broken, did she desire to see him again? No. The

last word had been said between them. Their *rendez-vous* was elsewhere, in the fields sown with asphodel, in the land of shadows.

Why then did she, who had so bravely accustomed herself to the idea of death, why did she allow herself to fall in tears on Charmion's shoulder? With her hand on the jade hilt of the little dagger which never left her, why did she murmur: "I have no strength!"

Was she thinking of breaking the engagement she had made? No, she would not survive Antony, she did not want to survive him. But does there not always enter into the kind of pact they had made the fear of not being followed? Supposing that when she was dead, Antony should go and make peace with Octavia, instead of rejoining her? And her jealous soul conjured up another reconciliation whereby Octavia would resume her place as his wife. Well! She was not going to be a party to such deceit. If she must go down into Hades, she would at least take away the certainty that her lover had preceded her. And she caused the false news of her death to be conveyed to him.

For the past hour, in the depths of the mausoleum, the Queen had been a prey to terrible anxiety. She kept on asking herself how Antony had received the news of her death.

Suddenly there was a sound without. It was as if a crowd were besieging the walls. Cleopatra looked through one of the small openings which served as windows. Great gods! What did she behold? A blood-stained body carried on a stretcher by soldiers. She recognised him.

After Antony had dealt himself the blow he learnt that his beloved was still living, and he longed to see her. He held out his arms despairingly. How could he join her again? For, as we have seen, a grating prevented entrance to the building.

Then ensued a moving and strange scene, one of

those superhuman acts which appear to be more like fable than truth when viewed across the centuries. With the aid of Iras and Charmion, whose devotion was unsurpassed, Cleopatra from the top of the flat roof threw down ropes to which the soldiers suspended the wounded man. What a weight for the frail arms of women! But even had he been still heavier they would have found strength to lift him, for love gave them power.

Antony lay at last on the heart of his mistress. There she held him in the act of expiring, and covered him with her scalding tears.

"My loved one, my hero whom I doubted!"

And he, in spite of the pain of his mangled body which the slightest movement increased, pressed himself close against her and said:

"Cleopatra! Embodiment of beauty! I am dying. Give me the sweet savour of thy lips once more."

And with their lips pressed to each other they exchanged a few last words, and sobs. . . . And when his last breath had flickered away, the inconsolable lover wailed forth her grief over the inanimate form which had been her pride and her joy:

"O most generous of mankind! Behold to what end thy love for me hath brought thee!" And she tore her breast.

How she loved him! It was almost a revelation. To whatever heights of passion two beings may have ascended it is perhaps only the great marriage union of the grave which enables the survivor to realise the strength of the bonds which united them. A gulf opens before them, he rolls into it, and plunges down to the lowest depths of woe. The world remains gloomy and dark. Ah! Why does not Nature of her own accord put an end to the poor wail that has been despoiled?

When he heard of the death of Antony, Octavius did not misunderstand its full purport. His royal prey was likely to escape him. He must at once get her into his power before she had recovered and regained the strength

necessary to carry out her designs ; he must save by stratagem what she had made up her mind to destroy.

It was no easy thing to penetrate into the mausoleum. Proculeius, the son-in-law of Mæcnas, who, like him, was blindly devoted to Octavius, undertook to do this. He was an old friend of Antony, and although he had gone over to the opposite camp he was one of those who seemed to have preserved some esteem for him. When dying Antony had named him to Cleopatra as the one man in whom she could have confidence to defend their interests and see to the future of their children.

When Proculeius asked the Queen to receive him as the bearer of condolences from Octavius and the Roman army, how could she refuse him ? Cautious and firm in her resolve to give no opening to anyone, she nevertheless made an effort to leave the bed to which her sufferings had confined her, and went down to receive her visitor to a small room below communicating with the outside by a grille.

Alas, every precaution was in vain ! While that astute man was interviewing the Queen through the iron bars, and was holding her attention by speaking of the magnificent funeral celebrations with which Octavius desired to do honour to his great rival, a body of men he had brought with him were treacherously preparing a surprise attack.

Cunningly as everything had been arranged, a slight noise nevertheless came to the ears of Cleopatra. For a moment she did not answer her interlocutor. With ears alert she heard something going on over her head.

All at once a door opened and Charmion appeared with terror-stricken countenance.

"Horror ! Treason ! They have broken in," she cried.

With ropes and ladders the accomplices of Proculeius had scaled the wall. They rushed in.

"Queen, thou art our prisoner," said one of them, advancing towards her.

"Thou shalt not take me alive!" proudly retorted Cleopatra as she drew from her belt the hidden little dagger.

It was too late! The weapon was snatched from her hand.

Cleopatra was a prisoner. She was led back to the palace between Roman soldiers, through the grille she had sworn never to pass again.

Octavius was at last master of the treasure he had coveted for so long. He hastened to draw up an inventory. Preceded by slaves carrying torches he traversed the subterranean vaults which had been destined to the flames by Cleopatra. It was a world in itself. Marvels of art, priceless jewels, rare woods and carpets, were heaped up to the roof. The amount of precious metal was so great that several ships were required to convey it to Ostia. Although not easily moved, when he beheld the ingots and piles of coins many of which rolled down as he passed by, he could not restrain the exclamation which was forced from the depths of his heart. There was now an end to the embarrassments which had hampered his necessitous youth. All his debts would be paid. The legions would receive large rewards in addition to their back pay, which would attach them to his person for ever, and gold would flow from a full purse, which would give birth to the surest devotion. Could he not, from that time, be certain of placing on his head the imperial crown which Cæsar had only lifted?

The population of Alexandria, who had feared devastation, but by a wise policy had been spared, gave the invader a friendly welcome. Exhausted by fifty years of revolutionary troubles they gladly accepted a rule ensuring order. The monarchical principle, moreover, was so solidly ingrained in the subjects of the ancient dynasty of the Lagides that the surest means of winning their respect and submission was to substitute one crowned head by another.

Octavius was no sooner seated on the throne of Cleopatra than many exhibitions of good will were offered him. Anxious to conciliate everyone, he flattered their pride in their beautiful city—a legitimate pride which every Alexandrine nourished. Theatres, palaces, museums, and especially temples, for he knew well that the favour of the priests was important, were the objects of politic manifestations on his part. Curious of all that might enrich his mind and prepare the way for the splendid order which was to characterise the reign of Augustus, he interested himself in the schools, the gymnasium, and the library. He requested the professors of the famous Serapeum to be presented to him (among whom he had the satisfaction of again meeting Areus the philosopher, his former professor at Athens) and promised to respect the independence they had hitherto enjoyed.

His visit to the Soma, the gigantic mausoleum where in a crystal coffin lay the body of Alexander of Macedon, was destined more than anything else to rivet the attention of a man to whom glory was everything. It was said that Cæsar, when in the presence of the illustrious remains, had uttered these words: "I weep because at my age he had already conquered the world." Still more ambitious than Cæsar, his nephew for a long time examined the royal mummy. He seemed to be asking it a question, and as though it was not enough to look at the earthly form which had conceived and realised such great designs, he ordered the covering to be raised, and with his hand, eager to the extent of profanation, ventured to feel the skull.

Cleopatra, as we have seen, had been brought back to her apartments at Bruchium. She was there kept under open guard. Due honours were paid her, but these only served to bring home more effectively that she was a prisoner, for they were rendered by Roman functionaries. From fear that she might poison herself a

search was often made among her robes, presses, and even on her own person. Could anything more wounding be imagined than the presence near her of a certain Epaphroditus, a freedman of Octavius who, playing the rôle of courtier in obedience to orders he had received, was hiding beneath obsequious manners his office of gaoler ?

However buoyant one may be by nature, emotions, catastrophes, and mourning wear one out in the end. Cleopatra fell ill. The wounds she had caused in tearing her breast had become inflamed, and she was consumed with fever. Her doctors announced that her condition was grave and might put an end to her life. For some moments the unhappy woman believed that Nature, sometimes pitiful, might spare her carrying out the act of her own deliverance, and she gave in to her illness as to a generous helper.

Octavius took alarm when he was informed. He held the gold, but had no less need of the woman. He wanted her whole and in no way impaired. "I must have her for my triumph in all her beauty," he said to himself.

Trusting to no one but himself to watch over her health, which was precious to him for so cruel a reason, he announced a visit. By this mark of deference he thought to overcome his captive, to blind her with illusions.

At the first moment his calculations seemed to be well-timed. On learning that Octavius wished to visit her Cleopatra summoned up a little strength. Her determination to die was adjourned. She would like to know her enemy and find out what she might hope or fear from him before the irretrievable step was taken.

What has not been said and written about the meeting of these two great figures who, like cryptic augurs, approached each other with their real thoughts concealed under a mask ? We know the unrelenting purpose of Octavius. But are we sure that that creature of grace and seductiveness may not have dreamed of again making

another start? Can we fathom the hopes on which her fading life may have clung? This remains the secret of a soul already turned towards the grave, a secret no one may know.

The flatterers of Octavius however did not neglect this occasion to represent their master as chaste and grave as the son of Theseus, in presence of the "hated courtesan" who was endeavouring to seduce him.

No one would think of denying that under other circumstances Cleopatra would have acted the courtesan, but in her condition of absolute listlessness, suffering from the wounds on her breast, with her eyes inflamed and her feet trembling at the thought of the thrones that had tumbled before them, after having consigned to the grave the man she adored, and having experienced the nothingness of all things—could she *still* play the part of a coquette? Her fine and clear intelligence, if not her dignity, would have saved her from making this mistake. Nevertheless, without any set purpose to attract the great potentate, and with no thought of looking for another Cæsar or Antony, was she not within her rights to imagine that any charms remaining to her from her thirty-eight years of passion and misfortune might render him accessible to pity? As for succeeding . . . We had best see the two antagonists face to face with each other.

After making a courteous bow Octavius took the chair by her bedside to which the Queen had motioned him. Then he made enquiries as to her state of health.

A sigh, a slight raising of the shoulders said in so many words: "Behold me! I have no strength left to live!"

At once he broached the subject nearest to his heart. What! The report had been true then? She was yielding to despair. Rather than submit to a domination which would have nothing harsh about it she had resolved to die?

Sobs were her only reply.

He continued again :

" Doubtless this is because my message hath been ill reported to thee. Did not Thyreus give thee to understand my real sentiments ? "

Yes, she knew them. She had been informed that she might hope for his regard, generous lord that he was !

" What then ? Take courage, Queen ; cease to behold in me an enemy."

His voice strove to be gentle, his looks to show benignity. But at the first glance Cleopatra had diagnosed his personality—a living rock. She noticed the sharp ridge of his nose which made him look like some bird of prey. And his dry lips ! From such no words of sincerity could come. From that moment she realised her part. And she entered resolutely into the fencing match wherein each was to display all their skill to aim at the eye of the adversary. She changed her attitude and feigned resignation.

Yes, it was true that when Antony died her grief was so violent that she did not think it possible to survive him.

" And now ? "

" Oh, now it is the thought of my children that holdeth me back ! The dear ones ! How can I leave them ? Not at any rate before I know the fate Rome hath in reserve for them."

Her children ! . . . Cæsarion, Ptolemy and Antyllas, were in the hands of Octavius—the first hostages he had seized. These gentle victims would have to answer for any lack of submission on the part of their mother.

With hypocritical words he made his meaning clear.

" Fear nought for them, Madam. The fate of thy children resteth on thyself alone. If thou wilt trust me, if thou wilt conform to my wishes, no evil shall befall them."

She knew how much this assurance was worth, and that her unfortunate children were destined for punishment just as she was ; but she made a semblance of trusting him.

"I have the word of Octavius."

"And thou too, fair Cleopatra, swear unto me that thou wilt not seek to end thy days by any means whatsoever, and that thou wilt not refuse to accompany me."

Cleopatra swore.

"Thou art sovereign lord," she said, inclining her beautiful head over which lay the transparent folds of a veil. "To whatsoever place it shall please thee to take me, I will meekly follow."

And in order to show him the extent of her submission, that from henceforth she was no more than his vassal, she took from the hand of her attendant a list she had drawn up of the jewels she still kept, and placing it in the hands of Octavius, she said :

"These are thine. I have only kept a few ornaments, the most valuable it is true, in order to offer them myself to Livia and Octavia."

This time he looked at her in astonishment. Was this really true ?

"Yes, I would like thy sister, now that the same grief uniteth us, to pardon me the wrong I have done her."

Distrustful as he was by nature, and thoroughly broken in to the arts of trickery, Octavius did not guess what lay under these words. His duplicity was but the duplicity of a man.

He now felt fully reassured and was preparing to leave her.

Not so soon. The Queen detained him. There was yet one other favour she had to beg. Since she must so soon leave Egypt and tear herself away from the dear city where her husband's body lay, might she at least be allowed to go and weep over his tomb ?

A prince can be generous to a docile captive. Imitating the example of Antony who, after the victory of Philippi, had magnanimously honoured the bleeding corpse of Brutus, Octavius granted the prayer of his widow.

So on the following day, although she could hardly

stand, Cleopatra had herself taken to the mausoleum. Her gaolers accompanied her. All the better ; she was going to give them a funereal scene. It was not enough to have convinced Octavius ; she must persuade everyone around her that she had accepted her fate. Only by these means could she gain the necessary liberty to act. So in the presence of witnesses who would not fail to repeat her words, and even her least gestures, she fell upon her knees. With tears and emotion, which at least were not acted, she poured oil and wine, the mystical food of the dead, on the raised stone monument. Then she went on to speech. Not one word which had not been prepared by that cunning woman in order to deceive her hearers. "Antony, O my beloved, my hands when they laid thee here to rest were the hands of a free woman ; this day it is a slave who offereth thee libations. May it please thee to accept them, since they are the only honours I can render thee, and they are the last. We, whom nothing could separate in life, are condemned in death to exchange our country. Thou, a Roman, wilt remain on this spot, while I, unfortunate that I am, shall find my grave in Italy, far away from the land of my fathers."

The effect produced by this pathetic farewell was what Cleopatra had expected. Even the most incredulous abandoned their doubts. Had she not in her own words accepted the fatality of her departure ?

Marvelling at the transformation which had come over his prisoner, Epaphroditus congratulated himself that she had given up the idea of ending her days. His watchfulness from that moment was relaxed. Coming and going at the palace became more free. The Queen was allowed to converse with those who came to visit her without the presence of witnesses.

Did not such a woman, in such depths of misfortune, deserve to meet with some devotion ? A man came to her aid whom she could hardly have expected. He was a Roman officer, who was to risk his neck, not indeed to

save the Queen, for alas ! she could no longer be saved, but to spare that proud and charming head from being bowed down in humiliation. Young and handsome, of the illustrious family of Cornelius, Dolabella had been valiantly fighting on the staff of Octavius throughout the campaign in Egypt. He was now carelessly amusing himself with the brilliant round of pleasures which followed the conquest of that great city.

It was his turn one morning to command the guard which was mounted at the Queen's apartments. It was when she was very ill. He saw her weeping and suffering, and yet she refused everything that might alleviate her. He heard her imploring death as some beneficent divinity. Most men who are especially susceptible to the charms possessed by attractive women, turn away when they no longer delight them. There are some, however, of finer stuff, who feel drawn to those whom misfortune has struck down. A bleeding heart, and eyes deadened with despair, exercise an influence on their heart which they cannot resist. As soon as Dolabella beheld her royal helplessness, and contemplated how the gods had pitilessly taken back everything they had formerly lavished on her, he felt a tender compassion rising up within him. With the pity one feels at the sight of a fair garden laid waste, he asked himself what he could do ? How could he help her ? Could he lift up again that divine flower profanely laid low by the storm ?

And before he had received any encouragement he went up to the suffering woman and offered his aid :

" Make use of me, Madam, as a thing that belongeth to thee."

What a touching surprise for the suffering creature whom everyone had abandoned ! For a moment, however, Cleopatra hesitated ; her hand drew back in fear. Supposing this was another Proculeius ! But no. There are some faces upon whom uprightness is graven, and looks which can be trusted. Her lacerated soul took courage, and all at once with the trust of a young girl

she expressed the only wish which had any chance of being granted. Might she know what were the intentions of Octavius concerning her? Could she be given notice of the day fixed for her departure?

The young man had means of access to Octavius. Friends who were in the secret of all that was going on in his immediate surroundings were able to inform him. Without perhaps knowing the fatal project in which he was making himself the accomplice, he gave his word. It was a promise full of danger and might cost him his life.

Three days later the prisoner was informed. Having decided to regain Italy by way of Syria and Greece, Octavius had given orders for her to be sent to Rome on the morrow, with her younger children.

The hour had come. Cleopatra knew that nothing now could change the course of her destiny. The necessity to die, which had been suspended over her for nearly a year, came down upon her with its full force. She contemplated it without terror. Perhaps when as yet her lips had drunk but a few mouthfuls of bitterness, she might have found pretexts for drawing back from this hideous moment. But to-day, now that she had drained the cup to the bottom, her part was irrevocable. She communicated the news to the two dear companions from whom she had no secrets, and charged them to have Olympus warned.

In order to draw off suspicion he had kept away, but his zeal was in readiness and everything was prepared under cover of darkness. The Queen had no misgivings in regard to him. She knew that the means to liberate herself would be at hand at the given hour. All she had to do was to wait and arrange everything according to their preconceived plans.

As a woman to whom elegance was a law, Cleopatra had resolved to embellish her death, as she had her life, by a rare and magnificent spectacle. Her pride as a Queen demanded too that Octavius, Agrippa, Mæcenas, even Proculeius, and all those Romans who had flouted

her, should admire not only the force of character which was to rob them of the degrading parade for which they had destined her, but also the outer shell of her aristocratic soul.

In an exaltation of mind, which still left her circumspect, she busied herself down to the smallest details. She bathed herself in warm and perfumed water. Her face was anointed with spikenard; antimony added mystery to the depth of her eyes, and a colouring of bright rose revived her lips and cheeks. The white robe, gleaming with gold and pearls, which had made her more than royal on the occasion of her coronation, was brought out from a cedar box. Jewels completed her toilette. What memories were attached to all these things! The dazzling procession, the exultant crowd, Antony handsome as Apollo in his two-wheeled chariot drawn by four snow-white coursers, and stepping down to proclaim her Queen above Kings, Empress, and Goddess, under the brilliant sky!

Cleopatra's fingers were trembling as she clasped the amethyst buckle of her belt. But stoically she stiffened herself. There must be no weakness. Her task was not yet finished. Things about her must not wear an air of mourning; everything must chant a pæan of deliverance. And roses were strewn on the carpets and tables. Incense smoked in the depths of their bowls. The shaded light of the lamps diffused soft gleams.

When everything had been arranged and brought into harmony with the great final scene, Cleopatra drew from a little secret drawer a letter she had written beforehand in which she commended her children to the generosity of the victor, and begged of him the favour to be allowed to repose by the side of Antony. After reading it over again she added the date (August 15, 30 B.C.)—a date which was to see no morrow for her—and affixed her royal seal.

Was it from some mocking sense of humour that she expressly charged Epaphroditus to convey this letter to

Octavius in person? It is by no means impossible, for Cleopatra had always loved to fool men. We may also suppose that she simply intended to rid herself of the presence of the man who impeded her. However this may be, he scented some trickery. It seemed imprudent to absent himself. He hesitated, but the message was urgent, and the Queen insisted with one of her smiles which no man could withstand.

Her gaoler allowed himself to waver. Besides, how could he suspect anything serious from a woman who had spent the day in futile occupations, in ransacking her presses and taking out ornaments and trinkets?

The evening meal was pursuing its course with the customary ceremonial. The servants came and went indifferently around the table. In order that no one should have any idea of what was afoot the Queen nerved herself to eat as usual and to maintain conversation.

Suddenly, from the further side of the curtain, an unusual sound arose. It seemed like an altercation. One of the guards, when asked what it meant, offered excuses; they were merely getting rid of a man, a peasant who was presuming to ask permission to speak to the Queen.

"What doth he wish?"

"To present a basket of figs with his own hands."

"Let him be admitted."

Cleopatra had understood. Her heart contracted sharply. It required all her tragic will power to keep back a spasm. Under his plebeian smock she recognised Olympus. Pale, but firm, she motioned him to approach.

No word passed. One look between them, and all was said. Olympus had been already paid. Cleopatra would know how to make use of his gift.

And now the Queen was alone with Iras and Charmion. These noble creatures who were to live no longer prepared to offer the last sacrifice. A sacred mystery envelops them. No one knows, nor ever will know, what were those stupendous rites.

The most accredited view is that a viper was hidden in the fruit. The poison of this snake had been already tried. It was deadly, as we have seen, in the manner the Queen required—painless, rapid, leaving no ugly traces.

We can readily imagine a repetition of the old story which has filtered through many religions—the woman and the serpent face to face. Their eyes meet, exchange a glint of fire, and defy one another. The serpent hesitates, recoils, and then, fascinated by a gaze stronger than his own, darts forward and implants his sting of death into the consenting flesh.

Iras was the first to succumb. She was more frail. The moment the poison began to circulate in her veins she lay down with her head on the knees of her well-beloved Queen, holding them in her embrace until she breathed her last.

Cleopatra, in her turn, felt her eyelids growing heavy. An irresistible languor came over her. Her mind began to wander. As in a dream she saw over again those days that had been her fairest. To the sound of flute and lyre she saw Antony hurrying towards her. How quick and joyous was his footstep! He might have been borne up on the light sand of the sea-shore! Where were they now? It was evening in a sweet-scented garden. A light breeze caressed them, wafting sweet sounds of music around their heads. Little by little the sounds died away. All became black. There was nothing more, but profound rest for ever.

Charmion was still breathing when the sharp clatter of steel aroused her from her lethargy. Quick blows resounded on the door.

“Open to us! Open!” cried imperious voices.

It was a body of men despatched by Octavius. He was following himself close upon their heels.

On reading the first words of the letter brought by Epaphroditus the truth had flashed upon him. The letter was her last will.

"Run! Summon the physicians!" he commanded. "Ten golden talents to the man who shall bring the Queen to life!" But would they not be too late?

Yes, since the gods are sometimes mindful of those who resemble them. They saved Cleopatra. Nothing could restore her to the hatred of her enemies.

Those who were the first to reach the chamber found her upon a purple bed resting on four sphinxes. All in white, and in the midst of flowers, she seemed to be asleep. Her face wore the serenity of a great work accomplished.

With staggering feet, and eyes already clouded, Charmion was reverently arranging her diadem.

"Here is a fine sight!" said Epaphroditus in bitter mockery, furious that his watchfulness had been deceived.

"Yea, in very truth! A superb act, worthy of the daughter of Kings," the Athenian girl found strength to answer. Then she too collapsed by the side of the woman she had served, honoured, and worshipped, right up to her last breath.

It was a rude blow to Octavius. It left him struck down as if by her death Cleopatra had robbed him of the splendour of his victory. And what would Rome say? And Italy? And all the rabble who were devoured by impatience, and were looking forward to feasting their eyes on the humiliation to be inflicted on the Egyptian woman? The Augustus of the morrow did not forget to avenge himself. His prisoner had escaped him, but her children would have to answer. Neither the prayers she had addressed to him, nor the entreaties of those bleating lambs who had committed no other crime than to be born, could soften his cruel heart. Antyllas was the first to be put to death. The likeness of Cæsarion to the divine Julius should have been enough to preserve this innocent boy. But this rendered him all the more hateful to Octavius.

"There is no room in this world for two Cæsars,"

declared Octavius as he gave orders for him to be strangled.

As for the other children of Cleopatra and Antony, who had not yet arrived at an age to become formidable, they were to take their mother's place in his triumphal procession.

Only one of the wishes expressed by the dead woman found grace with the conqueror. Contenting himself with taking a mask of her, he abandoned the body of his victim to the Alexandrines, who begged to have it. And decked as for her marriage they laid her beneath the same slab of porphyry which covered the body of Antony—the woman whose tempestuous love had cost her her kingdom, but in exchange had secured her an immortal memory.

Who of those hard Romans, whom their savage ambition armed against each other, has been more consistently celebrated than the lover of Cleopatra? What man has more completely escaped the disregard of succeeding centuries because he sacrificed his glorious destinies and abdicated all on the fair bosom of the Egyptian?

And Cleopatra, that ideal and perverse figure in whom all the fatal effects of passion were incarnate, what manner of woman was she? What true picture of her remains to us? How can we imagine to ourselves that dainty and proud being? Was she the adorable woman of whom Plutarch wrote: "Her charm penetrated the soul," or the "*fatale monstrum*" of whom Horace thanks the gods for having rid the earth? The gigantic figures graven on the crumbling walls of the temple at Denderah do not enable us to distinguish her. Neither do the medallions at Syracuse, where the profile of the priestess is cast in bronze. Who, under the form of these gross representations, would recognise the woman who was all intelligence, love, audacity, flame, and tempest? If only some masterpiece of Greek art had been preserved

to us! If only we possessed the statue ordered by Cæsar from the sculptor Timomachus, or that of the rich citizen of Alexandria who offered Octavius two thousand talents not to rob his country of it! But these have disappeared.

In our poverty, conjecture only is possible. And this is what to me she seems to have been like. It is not certain that Cleopatra was beautiful, at least with that beauty which impresses itself on the crowd, and which certain artists have attributed to her; but with her striking mouth, her fiery eyes, and slim body which the sun of her native land had polished like marble and gilded like a jewel, what woman ever excited like worship and desire?

“Les Rois mouraient d’amour en entrant dans sa chambre.” *

Physical charms however are not enough to explain the infatuation of a Cæsar, or an Antony, both prostrate at her feet, forgetful of duty, honour, and even the call of their country. We must seek elsewhere. First of all we discover in her an agreeable and cultivated mind seasoning her words, adorning them with charm, and banishing *ennui*, which is ever the shadow lurking behind greatness. But what made her without a peer and attractive beyond all others was the ardour of her nature. By whatever name we may describe Circe, Delilah, Heloise, Yseult, Carmen, the Sirens and the Valkyries, we may hold as certain that women whose presence throws men into a fever must always be great inspirers. Heroines like these are distinguished from common humanity because their hearts are stronger and more precipitate than other hearts, and by the burning torch they brandish aloft at which others come to be lighted. If Cleopatra pursued her glorious course on a higher level than her celebrated rivals it was because she possessed in a higher degree the sovereign gift of life which transforms the commonplace

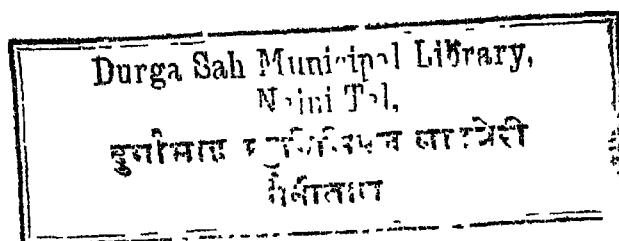
* From *La Légende des Siècles*, by Victor Hugo.

and creates an atmosphere of emotion. History shows her as having been at one and the same time, deep, shrewd, frivolous, generous, and capable of the worst cruelties, coveting the universe and renouncing it for a kiss.

But history only reveals the half of her. It is the imagination, with her winged daughters, poetry and legend, which we must question if we would know her. The viper which Shakespeare represents as twined round her arm contributes far more to her renown than her grandiose plans of making an end of Rome and replacing it by Alexandria. The famous sonnet which shows her riding on the waters of the Cydnus in her silver trireme tells us more about her than many learned volumes :

" Dont le sillage laisse un parfum d'encensoir *
" Avec des sons de flûte et des frissons de soie."

May I be excused for having tried in my turn to throw some light, even though obscurely, on the inner life of the woman who, lotus in hand, shed her voluptuous splendour over a tottering world ?



* From *Trophées*, by José Maria de Hérédia

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Ædile.—The Roman official in charge of the public buildings and municipal concerns of the city.

Agora.—Market-place.

Aoidos.—A choir boy.

Censor.—A Roman official among whose duties was that of assessing taxes.

Chlamys.—A short mantle.

Comitia.—The ancient assembly of the Roman people to elect the magistrates, and decide matters of public importance.

Discus.—The Greek quoit.

Gemoniæ.—The steps leading down from the north-western side of the Capitoline Hill in Rome where the bodies of criminals were exposed before being thrown into the Tiber.

Gyneceum.—The finishing school for young girls.

Microdouli.—Assistants of the Temple who ministered in the sacrifices.

Pileum.—Cap of Liberty.

Pschent.—The sacred emblem worn on the brow of the Egyptian kings on solemn occasions.

Quadriga.—A four-horsed chariot.

Sistron.—A kind of rattle made of little rings strung on a bent handle.

Spatulæ.—A kind of sharp skewer, round at one end and flat at the other.

Sportula.—The freedman's dole which was paid to him by his patron.

Sudatorium.—The Roman equivalent of the Turkish bath.

Thyrsi.—Rods tipped with a fir cone and bound round with vine leaves and ivy, carried by Bacchus and his Bacchantes.

THE END

